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Thaw: A Memoir

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THAW: A MEMOIR

by

Diane Bush

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

in

American Studies

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2009

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ABSTRACT

Thaw: A Memoir

by

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Utah State University, 2009

Major Professor: Jennifer Sinor

Department: English

This collection of creative nonfiction essays is a hybrid text of visual and verbal narratives located broadly within the genres of memoir, research-based nonfiction, and history. Women's memoirs, including a number of non-traditional texts, historical narratives, and an archival collection of photographs, provided springboards for the exploration of and reflection on the emotional terrain of loss, the ache of remembrance, and the ultimate desire for peace.

Ultimately, this work is a search for solace amidst emotional upheaval, beginning in childhood, after the deaths of my father, mother, first husband, and beloved aunt. Unable to sit still with my grief, I moved from the Midwest to various western states to pursue a career as a newspaper photographer and writer. My ongoing obsession with the tragic story of the Donner party, trapped in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the winter of 1846–47, connected me to Capt. Charles E. Davis, the first person to retrace the Donner party's western route on the first transcontinental highway. Finding common ground in the collective memory of historical tragedy, my fascination turned toward a man marked by similar childhood trauma, who took to the road to find a place to call home. As I searched for ways to memorialize loved ones, I found peace within the barren landscape of grief.

(103 pages)

The crocuses used to grow out of the snow. You would find them in pastures, the black-pitted dying snow still there, and the crocuses already growing, their greengrey featherstems, and the petals a pale greymauve. People who'd never lived hereabouts always imagined it was dull, bleak, hundreds of miles of nothing. They didn't know. They didn't know the renewal that came out of the dead cold.

—Margaret Laurence, *The Diviners*

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I lived with this project for many years before I wrote it down. I offer my deepest gratitude and respect to my committee chair, Jennifer Sinor. Her support and guidance during the two years I worked on this thesis was unfailing, constant, and as vital as breath. Chris Cokinos fueled my obsession with Capt. Charles E. Davis by saying the word *yes*. Melody Graulich's concept of "quirky little things" continues to inspire my every word, even the ones that don't appear on paper.

When I lost the location of the Sutter's Fort archives in Sacramento, I was lucky enough to find Judy Russo, registrar at the California State Parks, Sacramento History and Railroad Sector. She efficiently answered my many questions and graciously guided me through my visit to the archives. She continues to whet my appetite for historical research.

Kathy Gantz, Aleda Yourdon, Diane Fouts, Pamela Pierce, and Sabine Barcatta never questioned my sanity, a sign of true friendship.

I dedicate this work to Dan, who told me more than once that writing it would not make a difference. It did and it will.

Diane Bush

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Charles Davis at emigrant graves	66
2. Postmortem photograph	67

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
INTRODUCTION: MEMENTO MORI	1
DEE DEE AND THE MAGIC BOX	8
THAW	24
THE CROSSING	42
NOVA LUNA	58
SAVING SMUDGY	81
NOTES	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY	93

INTRODUCTION: MEMENTO MORI

When I first picked up a camera at age 14, I already knew about Ansel Adams's exquisite photographs. His iconic images of Yosemite's Half Dome and a small graveyard in Hernandez, New Mexico, appealed to millions who longed to place themselves within his epic western landscapes. His darkroom mastery and reliance on a mathematically complex method of exposure he helped invent inspired generations of photographers to expand their creativity through careful attention to detail.

As a teenager prowling Cleveland, Ohio's abandoned railroad yards, dilapidated houses, and the Lake Erie shoreline taking pictures, I was uninterested in techniques and tools; I was too busy looking—enamored with rusty bedsprings, giant iron wheels, and layers of peeling wallpaper. The vacant landscapes were heavy with the weight of anonymous lives. Photographing these empty places made them meaningful, at least that's how I saw them. I hadn't yet read Edward Weston's words, "The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself." Focused on broken eyeglasses and dirt-encrusted bolts, I stepped to the sad heartbeat of loss.

My father died when I was 12. My mom was bedridden after a series of strokes that began when I was little. My older sister was married and living in Chicago. In another dozen years, my first husband would become a paraplegic and die of a brain tumor. A few years after that, I would lose my mother and a beloved aunt and end a long-term relationship.

Through it all, I took pictures, spending hours—days—under the red glow of a safelight with my hands submerged in a tray of developer, breathing life into the highlights and rubbing the shadows with slippery fingers, coaxing details to emerge. Photography gave me a way to order one small part of a world that was spinning out of control. By giving voice to light, I created a safe haven for memory and for myself.

The heart of my story is a memoir steeped in self-preservation—not only how I lived through a painful past but how I went on living once I reached safety. Just as a memoirist sifts through a lifetime of words and stories to build an interesting narrative, photographs, particularly those memorializing the dead, provide links to my life as a photographer and my journey toward understanding and acceptance.

This is also a story of my obsessions—with the Donner party and a man named Capt. Charles E. Davis—subjects seemingly unrelated but united in the story I pieced together about my past, re-envisioned and rewritten as I went along.

My interest in the Donner party, a group of emigrants trapped in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during the winter of 1846–47, was piqued by a videotape from the PBS series *The American Experience* by Ric Burns, which I pilfered from a newsroom during my first photo internship in the early 1990s. Since then, I've retraced their route across the West several times, slept at the site of their camps near Donner Lake, read their memoirs, and paid my respects at their graves. What intrigues me the most about the Donner party is what happened to the survivors once they walked out of the mountains and into the rest of their lives. What would it be like to live with secrets so big that to tell them would be riskier than walking from Illinois to California?

Charles Davis spurned his wealthy Boston family to become a ship captain at age eighteen and to travel the world. As the owner of a café, marina, and dance hall on the shore of Mullet Island in California's Salton Sea, Davis came out of retirement in the late 1920s and spent thousands of dollars and the last years of his life retracing the Donner party's route from Wyoming to California, the first person to do so. He took over a thousand photographs, reburied and marked countless graves, interviewed dozens of old-timers, spoke to many newspaper reporters and historical societies about the need to mark the trail, and sent hundreds of pounds of artifacts back to California's Sutter's Fort. Before he died, he completed perhaps a hundred or more paintings of the Donner party, using paints he made from fish oil he rendered and pigments from the mud pots near his

home. The origin of his obsession, and why he never moved beyond it into old age, is uncertain.

The three of us—me, the Donner party, and Davis—make an unlikely trio. But all of our stories resonate with the emotional terrain of loss, the ache of remembrance, and the ultimate desire for peace.

Because this work is a hybrid text of visual and verbal storytelling about loss located broadly within the genres of memoir, research-based nonfiction, and history, no single model exists for my own story. I struggled to find a compatible framework until I recognized the futility of my task. Loss is messy, like a cracked jam jar leaking on the top pantry shelf. Loss is incomprehensible, like the deer that smashes into the side of your car. Loss is impossible, like stuffing feathers into a thimble. Just as we confront loss as individuals, each of us deals with it in a personal way.

My work covers a broad thematic territory encompassing loss, photography, and the relationship between history and memory. Memoirs written by woman about the impact of childhood losses on their adult lives comprise my primary thematic category. Interestingly, several of the books I read are non-traditional texts that explore hybrid forms of storytelling; these texts emerged as a second category. Finally, I looked at historical research about the Donner party and Charles Davis.

The memoir *Stealing Buddha's Dinner* by Bich Minh Nguyen came closest to what I wanted to emulate in method and tone. Nguyen's book is divided into a series of 16 essays of varying lengths, each titled after a food the Vietnamese author hungers for as she journeys from girlhood to adult in the 1980s. From silvery cans of Pringles and coconut-covered Snoballs to slippery *pho* noodles and her grandmother's *cha gio*, Nguyen seamlessly combined her memories of favorite foods with her longing for security and acceptance as she navigated the choppy waters between two cultures.

Unlike my work, Nguyen's narrative neatly matched her cross-cultural food infatuations, but we both address a common theme. Her book is one of loss—of her

traditional culture, of childhood—that is ultimately about her struggle to redefine and reintegrate herself into a new world. As the arc of Nguyen’s story moved forward in time so did her sense of self, and she emerged at the end of the book keenly aware of the woman she became.

My narrative follows a similar path, though it deviates from Nguyen’s in that loss punctuated my life at regular intervals. These losses have built up by the time my story begins, but I revisit them, both within individual essays and over the course of the narrative. Additionally, her immediate family was visible and nurturing throughout, unlike mine. So while Nguyen was able to rely on them for emotional support, mine was a solo journey.

The memoir *The Suicide Index: Putting My Father’s Death in Order* by Joan Wickersham promised a theme similar to my own—the death of her father when she was young—of personal loss wedded to a framework that told a complex, evolving story. Wickersham’s struggle to deal with her father’s suicide mirrored my experience more closely than Nguyen’s. The loss of a parent or spouse reverberates through a person’s life in surprising and sudden ways, and this fact alone bound Wickersham and me together. Her book followed an arc that wove together a wide range of emotions that pulsed and contracted with no discernable pattern, just as my Donner party obsession did when I first became aware of it.

Ultimately, Wickersham can never know the reasons for her father’s decision because he is dead; her ongoing search for answers varies from mine in that death by suicide is not the same as death by illness. While we tread some of the same ground, we do so under different conditions.

One way to depict the life of someone who has died is through a combination of research and meditational musings; fiction and nonfiction writers become adept at this technique to recreate scenes from the past. Julia Blackburn’s *Daisy Bates in the Desert: A Woman’s Life among the Aborigines* is a book that refuses categorization. Described

on the book jacket as “Women’s Studies/Travel” as well as “part biography, part history, part novelistic improvisation,” Blackburn’s book is a spirited account of a real-life figure who, beginning in 1913, spent almost 30 years living among the indigenous tribes in the Australian outback. While Bates wrote reams about her experiences, not all of it is true. In addition to archival research, Blackburn got to the heart of who Daisy Bates was by literally putting herself in Bates’s place—writing in lyrical, first person prose as Bates copes with the realities of desert life and her role as Kabbarli, “the white-skinned grandmother,” to aging tribal members. Blackburn’s observations made her story of this eccentric, historical figure vivid and compelling.

Writing about my deceased family members is challenging because they left no personal record aside from photographs. Additionally, Charles Davis’s legacy is a collection of over 1,000 photographs. In the same way that Blackburn used Bates’s words to improvise her world, I use and speak of photographs of my family and Davis to re-imagine their lives.

While some have questioned Blackburn’s technique, to me, it provided a way for her to understand someone who is physically unavailable. It also gave her incredible freedom to stretch her boundaries as a writer. This release from the frame of traditional storytelling allowed Blackburn to get to the emotional essence of Bates’s story. While I don’t become my characters, I write their stories in a similarly engaging way.

Likewise, Kathryn Harrison’s *While They Slept: An Inquiry into the Murder of a Family* blended memoir and literary nonfiction as it detailed the author’s obsession with the murder case of Billy Gilley, who murdered his parents and sister in 1984. Relying heavily on interviews with Gilley and his older sister, Jody, Harrison followed her own quest to reconcile childhood abuse at the hands of her father to her current life. Harrison saw “a self who is out of reach and unknowable” both in Jody and herself, and she picked apart the past in order to understand how each was able to salvage what remained of her original identity in order to live with the past.

While Harrison's presence hovered below the surface, her book is ultimately less about herself than it is the Gilleys; her research emphasized personal interviews and other forms of one-on-one communication, which I could not do. Some critics have argued that Harrison's presence in the book is distracting and unnecessary. But it is her intense emotional connection to Jody Gilley that fascinated me. She continually dug at the meaning behind their obsession with putting their lives in order, just as I do. She also captured how the past resists a written explanation:

Reassemble is the word that comes first to my mind, before *re-forge* or *re-create* or *reintegrate*. ... [T]he reassembled are aware of fracture lines, of being, like mended teacups, carefully glued together and not at all strong at the broken places. ... Jody has done the necessary work of autobiography already; she's narrated herself toward understanding, sanity. To return and linger in her past for as long and sustained an effort as a book requires would be not only painful but, she fears, dangerous to the equilibrium she consciously guards. The life story that she engages with is the after part of her life, the continuing, living narrative of the reconstructed Jody, not the terminated life of the girl she was before.

Writing down my story in order to stitch my life together was the primary reason I entered graduate school. Unlike Jody, I consciously examine the broken parts of my life. My work as a freelance copyeditor complements my current relationship with words as an archivist, documentarian, and memoirist actively weighing the worth of words in order to write a complete story.

Contextualizing historical events and the people that lived through them allows me to tell as accurate a story as possible. Although there are many Donner party texts I could have consulted, each one had its limitations. Historian Kristin Johnson is a highly regarded Donner party authority. She summed up the literature on the group this way: "As it stands ... none of the currently available histories of the Donner party was written by a trained historian, and each suffers from its author's lack of objectivity, unfamiliarity

with standards of historical scholarship, literary inclinations, or a combination of these factors.”

However, for my purposes, one text stood out. *History of the Donner Party* by C. F. McGlashan was Davis’s bible during his travels, and it provides clues as to why Davis was so interested in the emigrants’ story. Indeed, before he left on his trip, Davis interviewed McGlashan. Notes describing their meeting are in the Charles E. Davis Overland Trail Project Collection in California, which I have visited.

Similarly, Eliza Poor Donner Houghton’s memoir *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate*, written in 1911, was the result of her 13-year effort “that when I grew to be a woman I would tell the story of my party so clearly that no one could doubt its truth!” Donner was a long-time and frequent correspondent of McGlashan’s. In fact, their “collaboration” was so close that Houghton “had actually written some of the text” of the book.

Using these particular historical texts, with all their imperfections, reveals additional knowledge about how we actively shape stories of trauma, especially the overwhelming desire to tell a story that happened many years before.

The five linked essays that comprise *Thaw: A Memoir*, and the order of their appearance, trace a narrative arc that fluidly moves from despair to hope and from ignorance to understanding. *Dee Dee and the Magic Box* introduces the cast of characters in the four essays to follow, along with the idea of taking photographs as a way to negotiate loss. The second and third essays, *Thaw* and *The Crossing*, use the Donner party tragedy to explore the melding of personal and collective history. Expanding on this concept in the last two essays, *Nova Luna* and *Saving Smudgy*, I confront members of my immediate family and find alternative ways to memorialize loved ones. In acknowledging a lifetime of traumatic losses, I embrace the cyclical nature of life and find a measure of peace.

DEE DEE AND THE MAGIC BOX

We photographers deal in things which are continually vanishing, and when they have vanished, there is no contrivance on earth which can make them come back again.

—Henri Cartier-Bresson, *The Decisive Moment*

she alone in the woods
 pink her fingers
 straps orion to her hips and
 hollers
 in spring blossoms, blizzards
 falls petals meteors
 sleep

Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Dee Dee. Her long braids were the color of clover honey, her gray eyes the color of worn buffalo nickels. She lived in a two-story white house with her mother, father, sister, and aunt. One day in late summer, her mother asked her to go into the nearby woods to pick some wild black raspberries for a pie. “Go to the place where the bleeding hearts grow and look to the edge of the creek,” her mother said. “There you’ll find enough berries to fill your pail. But don’t stray from the path or you might get lost. And be careful where you step. The rocks near the water are slippery.”

Dee Dee was not afraid of the woods. She had been there many times with her Aunt Fan, who had lived with her family for as long as she could remember. Aunt Fan wore housedresses the color of Easter eggs, made Dee Dee goose liver sandwiches on white bread, and bought her Matchbox cars to play with. She first discovered the black raspberries growing next to a clump of flowers so pink they reminded Dee Dee of wads of Bazooka bubblegum.

She ran to get her rubber pail, the one with red, blue, yellow, green, and white swirls. When she was little, her family used to go to a beach that was a long drive away

from their house. While her mom sat in a striped lawn chair chain-smoking and reading the latest from Book-of-the-Month Club and her older sister, Lynne, jumped over the waves, Dee Dee and her aunt built sandcastles. She would pack the wet sand as tight as she could into her pail, and Aunt Fan would turn the pail over to make towers for the castle. The waves of Lake Erie were fast and strong, and their sandcastles always washed away before they could finish them. Dee Dee wished her dad could see her sandcastles, but his long hours on the job as a foundry foreman kept him from going to the beach or on other family outings.

Maybe I started taking pictures because I wanted to be like my dad. I know I learned about photography from watching him and from the boxes, envelopes, and albums full of glossy squares and rectangles. He must have been behind the camera because he is rarely visible in our family photos. In those where he does appear, he wears a white shirt and dark suit coat as if he just walked in the door from work.

I remember him best for the movies he shot with his hand-crank movie camera. Gray with silver edges, the camera held a palm-sized 8 mm cartridge emblazoned with a bright yellow label on which red letters spelled out the word Kodak. Each cartridge contained three minutes of film that we watched in our basement because that's where Dad hung the textured movie screen that sounded like sandpaper when he unrolled it. The projector was heavy, musty smelling, and the color of weak coffee. Dad muscled the bulky machine on top of the counter in front of the liquor bottles. He patiently threaded the film through a series of guides that looped and twisted the film into a fancy bow. Then he would snap off the lights and flick the projector's toggle switch. Dust filtered through the narrow beam of light and the air sang with the sound of the film moving through the metal sprockets. I held my breath in anticipation as the white leader strip punched with holes appeared onscreen. In seconds, there I was in my orange sun suit running toward him on a Disneyland lawn, feeding caged bears at the Cleveland Zoo, jumping on one of

my parents' twin beds to show off my long bangs, crying on my mom's shoulder at JFK International Airport when my sister left for a six-week trip to Europe. I hated the camera that day. I hated him for moving around to get a better shot of my red-rimmed eyes and tear-streaked cheeks.

Even then, I understood the power of the camera to freeze people in time so that you remember how they appear on film, not necessarily who they are. That scene in the airport remains vivid and embarrassing even now, maybe because it is the first time I felt the emptiness that accompanies goodbyes, how it tugged at my heart and took my breath away. I couldn't control myself, and in my family, any display of emotion, good or bad, wasn't acceptable. That my Dad chose to focus on my reaction to Lynne's leaving, like any good photographer, confused me. I buried my face in my mom's hip so he couldn't see my face. On film, she laughs and pats my back while glancing knowingly at my father, her lips curling up at the corners.

I recognize her reaction from my first posed picture taken a little more than a month after my birth. Mom crouches close to where I'm propped up in the middle of a slipcovered chair, decked out in a long, white christening gown. She watches me cry with calm bemusement, red-red lips slightly smirking, as if she is in no hurry to comfort me. Even then, she kept me at arm's length, a practice she would continue for the rest of her life.

Dee Dee was happy to go to the woods by herself while Aunt Fan cooked stuffed peppers for dinner and her mom watched Mike Douglas on their new color TV. Dee Dee pulled on her red sneakers, checked the rubber bands in her hair, and ran out the door.

She skipped to the corner of Ford and Richmond and turned right through a dusty field buzzing with honeybees. She thought of the pie her aunt would bake, how the bright purple juice would ooze out of the thin cuts her aunt made on top of the pie in the shape of a B—for black raspberry. The berries' soft, black caps fit perfectly on the ends of Dee Dee's fingers, and after she covered all of her fingertips, she would eat each berry one

by one. Purple juice stained her fingertips for days afterward, but she didn't care. To Dee Dee, black raspberries tasted like summer. She loved them almost as much as she loved Aunt Fan.

She and Dee Dee were constant companions—they rode the bus for hours to downtown Cleveland to go shopping; built the biggest snowmen and tallest sledding hills in their backyard; tore up soft white bread into the blue roasting pan for stuffing. Aunt Fan, not her mom, guided Dee Dee through the maze of childhood into the safety of her bed. And that's not necessarily sad. Sometimes that's just the way it is.

Lynne, having long returned from her trip to France, bought me my first single lens reflex camera, a Canon TL, in 1974 for my 14th birthday. Within a few years I prowled Cleveland's abandoned railroad yards, dilapidated houses, and the Lake Erie shoreline, enamored with rusty bedsprings, giant iron wheels, and layers of peeling wallpaper. The vacant landscapes were heavy with the weight of anonymous lives. Photographing these empty places made them meaningful, at least that's how I saw them.

I learned how to develop and print film as part of a senior project in high school and spent hours in a cramped makeshift darkroom set up in a school closet. Under the red glow of a safelight with my hands submerged in a tray of developer, I watched images magically appear. Pressing my face close to the tray, I breathed life into the highlights and rubbed the shadows with slippery fingers, coaxing details to emerge. I thought myself special because no one else at my all-girls' Catholic school took their dates to decrepit railroad roundhouses to wonder at the patterns in broken windows.

Beginning photographers are always surprised to learn that they're not the first to recognize the hidden lives of objects. This was long before I learned about Edward Weston's sensuous peppers, Eugene Atget's silent mannequins, and Minor White's ethereal clouds. I hadn't yet read Weston's words, "The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself."

Focused on broken eyeglasses and dirt-encrusted bolts, I stepped to the sad heartbeat of loss, unaware of the meaning or history of my photographs.

In time, I saw pictures everywhere and shot roll after roll of ordinary objects in every room of the house. Multicolored cellulose sponges banded with thin shadows from the wooden blinds, candles in a wicker basket arranged like spokes on a wheel, even Kaboom cereal in a white porcelain bowl with the morning sunlight softening the hollow eyes and smile stamped on each piece of cereal.

The viewfinder opened a window to a world that existed only for me. I had no interest in arranging objects to create a still life, a perfectly composed scene; my concern lay in looking deeply at the world around me in ways others could not see.

A calliope of grasshoppers, blue jays, and cardinals filled the air. The black raspberries flourished in a tangle of brambles at the far end of a field. As her pail bumped lazily at her legs and she swatted mosquitoes, Dee Dee became sticky with sweat and dirt from the dusty path.

She soon came to the big rock that marked the place where the path entered the forest. She peered into the dappled shade that looked a little like the lace her aunt tatted around hankies—circles of light poked through the curving shadows of leaves and shimmered like stars.

Tiny thorns grew thickly on the long, skinny black raspberry canes. Dee Dee snaked her arm through the canes toward the berries as if playing Cat's Cradle. After a few minutes of picking, a sweet purple rash covered her fingers and tongue. She filled her pail as fast as she could. As she turned to go, she couldn't resist taking a peek at the bleeding hearts—her favorite flower.

"Just for a minute," Dee Dee thought to herself. "I can draw Mom a picture of them, and she'd like that." She put down her pail, got down on her knees, and brought her face right up to the blossoms. The blushing hearts delicately nodded at her, their tear-

shaped tips translucent, glowing with inner light.

The crickets chirped in a slow and steady buzz that made her groggy. Soon she was asleep.

With abstract images, when you move in close, it's just you, the object, and the light. You watch frost etch brushstrokes on a windowpane and that intimacy becomes sensual and meaningful. Every surface has a specific texture, yet light can alter it: stuccoed walls become buttercream frosting; green peppers are voluptuous bodies. You don't have to put some long explanatory caption on abstract images either. You can call them Sickle or Tractor or Linoleum and by saying each word—by naming each object—you've made it real. Why wouldn't I be drawn to photography? It allowed me to speak in beams of light.

Light has its own language that changes throughout the day. The deep blue shadows of morning brighten as the sun warms them. Harsh light at high noon creates heavy shadows. A cloudy sky acts as a giant softbox that gently cradles people and objects in diffused light. Late afternoon sun, slanting and magical, paints the world in shades of raspberry, orange, and lemon. Look at any stunning magazine photograph and guess what time of day it is. Invariably, photographers make award-winning scenics and portraits during the "magic hour" before sunset when the light becomes luminous.

I live in a northern Utah mountain valley where alpenglow is a regular occurrence, and I'm still surprised at the beauty of light. I worry about people who don't notice colors of light because they are too busy texting or driving or moving.

As a photographer, I learned to be patient. You can't make the world happen on your schedule. "Hurry up and wait," was a truthful expression because you had to arrive early at a news event to get a good seat but then often waited an interminable amount of time for a press conference or meeting or game to begin.

Dee Dee woke with a start. She felt a rush of air past her face, like a delicate bird wing had brushed her cheek. Inhaling the clean scent of the forest, she recalled standing in an open meadow in the park where she liked to play. A bright flash of light made her blink. She saw a large raven tracing a wide circle over her head. A silver box hung from the bird's mouth attached to a black cord. As Dee Dee watched, the raven swooped to the ground, dropped the box at her feet, and flew away. Had that happened or was it a dream? She couldn't remember.

"Oh no," she said, noticing the empty pail lying on its side. "An animal must've eaten my berries while I was asleep. What will I tell Mom?" She looked around and shivered. The fading sunlight played on the shimmering leaves, turning them silver, gold, copper.

The light caught the edge of a metal box lying next to one of the biggest Jack-in-the-Pulpits she had ever seen. Did the flower's green tongue speak her name? Maybe it was just the wind in the trees. She was so curious that she forgot to look for snakes before she picked up the box.

At six inches square, the box was surprisingly heavy for its size with two dials on top and words on the side that Dee Dee couldn't read. There was a small window on one side of the box. Dee Dee held the window up to her left eye and aimed it at the creek bubbling nearby. What she saw almost made her drop the box.

In the window, Dee Dee saw a school of fish swimming upstream. There was a blue green frog perched on a rock onshore, a bubble filling its throat. Dee Dee looked up from the box. There was the creek, there was the rock in front of it, but there was no fish, no frog.

She looked through the window again at a patch of dirt next to the rock. Wildflower bulbs and roots underground swirled with bright colors. As she watched, the colors coiled inside each bulb—white for mayapples, purple for violets—like when Aunt Fan rolled her colored thread into a ball so it wouldn't become tangled. It was if each bulb contained a

tiny machine making next season's flowers. After half a minute, when the color had filled the bulb to nearly bursting, the bulb turned dark, as if someone switched off a light.

Dee Dee swung the magic box in every direction, discovering more wonders than she could count. She saw horsehair, acorns, mushrooms, fur, bones, teeth, even the smoothed-over footprints of wolves and bears. She recognized the tracks from her schoolbooks. Near another rock, she found colored glass beads, rough rawhide strings from buckskin pants, turkey feathers, and flint chips no bigger than her thumbnail. When she aimed the box past the trees, small figures moved in a line across the frame; some were leading horses. Dee Dee looked up at the empty field. She turned and ran home as fast as she could, anxious to show her mother and aunt the amazing box.

At its heart, photography is mechanical, chemical, and ephemeral, a record of a moment that is fleeting, transient, evanescent. When we press the shutter, we are plunged into darkness. Light enters the camera, strikes the film's light-sensitive emulsion, and records what we think is there. Invisible as the film spools through the camera is a series of latent images with the potential to be photographs but are not yet. Developing film with chemicals and care, the image appears, just as time reveals the imprint of loss stamped on our hearts.

Sometimes I didn't take pictures on purpose. I called them zen pictures in honor of David Rae Morris, my mentor at The Minnesota Daily, the college newspaper where we both worked. David Rae was the best photographer I knew, and he introduced me to German philosopher Eugene Herrigel's Zen in the Art of Archery. The book, while not about photography specifically, describes, in David Rae's words: "the mental process all artists apply to their crafts. In photography, the difference between getting a mediocre image and a great one can often ... be determined by a fraction of a second. This raises the question of how a photographer captures the moment: Does he or she instinctively know when to release the shutter, or is it perhaps just chance or circumstance?"

Dictated by my profession to not only capture the moment but the decisive one—the height of action—editors exerted constant pressure on me to bring back page-one art. In my mind, the act of seeing but not taking a picture deliberately was revolutionary. Through the years, I’ve amassed a long list of zen pictures that include an early morning moonrise over the red-tinged Wellsville Mountains, a sunset-drenched picture of my friend Theresa standing shin-deep in the waters of Bear Lake, and a farmer rolling a giant aluminum wheel across a field in the Illinois twilight. These scenes exist as extraordinary moments that I selfishly share with no one but myself.

In all the years I took pictures professionally, I never once called myself an artist. When I said I took pictures, I meant that my skills as a photographer did not make me an expert on my subjects. I just aimed a silver box and watched life unfold. When I became a photographer, I joined a family that stretched around the world. Famed tabloid photographer Weegee used to say, “F8 and be there,” so we said it too. The phrase meant that as long as you showed up and set your camera to an aperture that assured most everything would be in focus, you would get a good photo.

The concept of photography as an extension of my personality comforted me. I belonged to a clan that communicated through a box that caught still moments in a world in constant motion. And if a photographer had the guts to ask subjects to repeat actions they initially missed, I viewed them as liars, spreading false stories about themselves and life around them.

When she pulled open the screen door, Dee Dee heard the *click-click-click* of a fork as Aunt Fan mixed cold cubes of butter into white flour for pie dough.

“Aunt Fan. Aunt Fan,” she said, almost out of breath. “Look what I found.” Dee Dee held up the silver box.

Aunt Fan put down her fork. “Where did you find this box? And where are the berries for the pie?”

Dee Dee's words spilled out of her mouth as she told her aunt about the raven that brought the magic box, the box that could see invisible things. Aunt Fan looked at Dee Dee and smiled. When Dee Dee's father asked her to watch over his family, she never knew she would become so fond of the little girl who loved the woods but was sometimes afraid of the dark. "What will become of her after I'm gone?" she wondered.

"Where's Mom?" Dee Dee asked.

"Gone," Aunt Fan said simply.

"Where did she go?"

Aunt Fan looked into Dee Dee's eyes. "Now Dee Dee. You know where she is."

"But tell me again, Aunt Fan. I like how you tell the story."

Aunt Fan folded her hands together and rested them under her chin. Her lips parted slightly, and she paused, considering her words.

"Dee Dee," she began. "You're not a baby anymore. I can tell you the truth. Your mother is not visiting Angie at the old house on Mt. Auburn. She is in heaven."

"Just like Dad?" Dee Dee said, tracing the gold squares on the Formica tabletop.

"Yes, Dee Dee. Just like your daddy."

Dee Dee took a deep breath. She talked for a long time.

As a working photographer, I spent hours in red-tinted cocoons and thrived on the risk inherent in the developing process. I might unevenly wind the film on the stainless steel reels, mix chemistry too strong or too weak, or add fixer to the tank instead of developer. If I screwed up in the darkroom, the picture of the century wouldn't get me the front page above the fold in the smallest weekly let alone the cover of LIFE Magazine.

When I passed through the revolving door, I entered a room as dark as midnight yet as familiar as my childhood bedroom. A large stainless steel sink with developing trays, tanks, and reels stacked inside it dominated one side of the room. The opposite, dry, side contained an enlarger on top of a long counter lined with timers, boxes, easels,

filters, and other darkroom tools.

There were weeks when I spent more time in the darkroom than I did at my apartment. One New Year's Eve, I developed prints until well after the bars closed at 1:00 a.m. to give all of the drunks enough time to careen home before I stepped outside. I laughed, cried, got drunk, got high, had sex, cursed, sang, and danced in darkrooms from Coos Bay, Oregon, to Cleveland Heights, Ohio.

With the advent of digital cameras and Photoshop, newsroom darkrooms are a rarity. Now when I hold one of my 8x10 prints, I note the thick, slightly rippled paper, the rich blacks and bright highlights, the image framed by a dark irregular border made by filing down the edges of the negative carrier. Like the graceful stalks of water lilies transformed into backbones embedded in rock, this print records a period that has vanished—timeless and extraordinary.

I once took a picture of my first husband, Dennis, that won first place in a local newspaper contest and was later printed in a book by Kodak, my first published photo. "Gleeful Moments" the headline reads above my picture of Dennis with a broad smile on his face, taking an impromptu shower with a garden hose. He doesn't seem concerned that his clothes are getting soaked. The water droplets gleam off the metal of his wheelchair.

I later took a color snapshot of him lying in a hospital bed. His crooked smile is tight because of his swollen cheeks, the result of steroids that tried to stop his brain tumor from growing. A knit cap perches above his ears on top of his bald head.

At the University of Minnesota's graduate school, I hung around with a bunch of other photographers, and we took our cameras everywhere. It was as if our bodies were extensions of our cameras; we took so many pictures of ourselves doing mundane things. Favorites were giant outdoor statues (popular in Minnesota), group shots around crude signs ("Dog Area," "Smile"), and sitting in restaurants and bars. Going to the state fair was akin to a Disneyland vacation. I think I cherish these photos more because they show

my friends and me in places where we felt comfortable. We used our cameras to catch images as they streamed by, fully in the present moment.

When you're among a pack of journalists covering a story, there's this sense of us and them: the media and those who provide the news. Acknowledging that separation led to documentary projects on the Super Bowl, the Indianapolis 500, and the Mall of America, where I challenged the typical images provided by organizations and companies. Showing other sides to the same story increases the likelihood that all are included, that a more complete picture emerges. This is the power of documentary photography: to raise awareness by consciously shaping information to tell a different story. No photograph is neutral because the person behind the camera has her own biases. For me, respect for my subjects and the urge to show hidden scenes seemed to drive my best work.

Dee Dee kept the magic box for many years. Yet she realized that what was wondrous to her might frighten others. She gave the box to friends and family members who were especially lonely or sad or missing someone they hadn't seen in a long time. They would look through the box and not feel so sad anymore. As Dee Dee's hair turned gray and her bones became more fragile, she brought out the box less and less. Eventually, she forgot about it until one day at sundown, a stranger knocked on her door.

Dee Dee lived alone with her 10 cats and wasn't used to visitors. The man before her had striking light blue eyes and a kindly smile. He wore a suit the color of a blackbird's wing—ebony brushed with cobalt and gold. The man bowed low and tipped his hat.

“Good evening,” he said. His voice was as rich as the darkest chocolate, thick like caramel. “May I come in?”

I am standing at Aunt Fan's bedside at the Walker Methodist Health Center in

Minneapolis where she lies in a coma. Aunt Fan was born the year they discovered x-rays in Austria and gold in the Klondike. As a young girl, she watched helplessly as her sister Mildred died in her arms from diphtheria. She raised brothers who became good-for-nothing drunks and sisters who became mothers, and she has outlived all of them.

Her hands float a few inches above her face, fingers gently curled above her open mouth, as if it is lunchtime and she is eating her usual half sandwich. Aunt Fan ate things I would never touch, like turkey necks and head cheese and pimento loaf. We shared a fondness for braunschweiger, otherwise known as goose liver. I liked mine on white bread with a little mayo just like she did.

As I watch her chest rise and fall with quiet breaths, I think about all of the baloney sandwiches she made for me and all of the pails of black raspberries we picked standing side by side. My mind wanders to a stack of death certificates in a file folder that I never open, a bundle of holy cards in the Hungarian Bible that I cannot read; papers that mark the deaths of my father, mother, and first husband. It has been 21 years since my father died. I am now 33, in my first year of graduate school, with a new job as a staff photographer at The Minnesota Daily.

In high school, I took a picture of Aunt Fan that is still in my portfolio and remains one of my favorites. The photo shows her and my cat Fig sharing a chair. Light from the bay window just off camera creates soft shadows and accentuates the veins in her hands. Her fingers could tat intricate lace, roll out strudel dough in paper-thin sheets, and scrub stains off the laundry with gritty Fels Naptha soap. What strikes me most about the picture is how she has tucked herself into one corner of the large chair so that the cat has enough space to stretch her legs. Fig's haughtily crossed paws and half-closed eyes and the frayed fabric at the bottom edge of the chair leave no question as to who wields the power in the house. Aunt Fan smiles at the camera in her kind, almost mischievous way, oblivious to the fact that the cat is using her.

Whenever I look at that photo, which was made when I barely understood the

mechanics of my camera, I remember all that I loved about Aunt Fan and my childhood home and how far I had to travel before I realized that I did.

My fingers brush the cold metal of the camera body slung over my shoulder. These days I always carry a camera, and this is the most expensive one that I own: a black Leica M6 rangefinder with a Leitz 28mm Elmarit lens. The whole package cost me nearly \$3,000 a few months ago. Favored by documentary photographers, the lens features superb optics and the shutter releases with an almost undetectable click. The camera is my most valuable possession.

Before I can stop myself, I bring the viewfinder to my left eye, use the focusing screen to match the two edges of one side of my aunt's head to make a smooth line, and press the shutter release button. I glance backward at the open door, suddenly fearful. I have just taken a picture of my dying aunt, joining countless other photojournalists who unblinkingly document the rites of life and death.

I set the camera in my lap, resisting the urge to rip the film out and throw it in the wastebasket.

Dee Dee made them cups of hyssop tea sweetened with honey. They eased into soft chairs in front of a stone fireplace where a fire was blazing. Orange shadows whirled around the room like the home movies she watched as a girl. The man cleared his throat and began to speak.

“You may not recognize me, but I’ve known you ever since you were a baby. I was familiar with your family when they toiled at their forges and farms in Hungary and Austria. I knew your grandparents, Dee Dee.”

Dee Dee stared at the stranger who called her by her childhood nickname. How did he know so much about the Koenigs and the Tamases? Both her mother’s and father’s parents died before she was born. Only one or two photos of them even existed.

“Do you remember the time you were waving goodbye to your father and fell

off the chair you were standing on? Your head hit the floor and you blacked out.” Dee Dee nodded; she pictured her brain swimming in the shell of her head like a school of minnows riding the ocean currents.

“That was the first time we met,” the man continued. “But I saw you occasionally throughout the years you lived in Lyndhurst.” He took a sip of his tea—black with lots of sugar.

“I met your mother and father. I knew Dennis,” he said.

Dee Dee hadn’t heard the name of her first husband in many years. She was tired of this game. She stood up, her eyes on fire.

“Who are you to come into my home and say you know me without telling me your name? How do you know so much about me? Who are you?”

One day I just stopped taking pictures. Newspapers were going digital, and I was a dinosaur, unwilling to learn (and purchase) a new camera bag full of equipment. Then my camera died. I mourned that black titanium-bodied F3 and MD-4 motor drive with the picture of Calvin on the back and the tiny rubber black cat glued next to the hot shoe. A few years later, I sold the rest of my equipment for less than a thousand dollars.

“Don’t be afraid,” he said, getting up from his chair. “I’ve only come for something you borrowed from me many years ago.”

“What are you talking about? I’m not sure I even know you.”

“The silver box, Dee Dee. The magical silver box.”

Instantly, she knew the real reason for his visit. She walked to the next room. The silver box was on a closet shelf, wrapped in the blue sweater Aunt Fan wore every day in the years before she died. Dee Dee carefully unwrapped the box, nestling it first in one arm then the other, as she put her arms through the knitted sleeves and tugged the sweater over her shoulders.

“Thank you for the camera, Raven,” she said, placing the box in his outstretched palm. “I am ready to go with you now.”

He smiled.

“You see how your burden became a gift. How photography gave you permission to say your own goodbyes. In living through the deaths of Ernest, Marie, Frances, Dennis, and so many others, you learned a great lesson, not to be afraid.”

He touched her hand and the night, a blackness that always seemed so distant, became hers. The night, the stars—all of it—became hers.

sweet what a heart
 tastes like
 seeds storms bones
 raven black and crimson
 your face
 her face
 if only I could remember
 faces
 this knotted cloud
 his face
 my loves
 with me always

THAW

Something we were withholding made us weak
Until we found out that it was ourselves
We were withholding from our land of living,
And forthwith found salvation in surrender.

—Robert Frost, from “The Gift Outright”

We all have cannibals in our closets.

—Carol A. Travis-Henikoff, *Dinner with a Cannibal*

The air is fetid with unwashed bodies, the stink of boiled oxhides, of ashes, earth, and blood. Wrapped in a blanket Levinah Murphy lies on her side watching a blackened pot of bones tremble over the fire. The bones click and jump like dancing skeletons, and she imagines tiny figures leaping in the boiling water. The low flames cast a red glow on the stone hearth but provide little warmth. Next to her, tiny Catherine Pike, the nursing baby of her daughter, gone with the snowshoe party, lies quietly. The thin gruel the widow prepares each day from a small spoonful of coarse flour mixed with water is the only nourishment she can offer. It is not enough. Her granddaughter is starving.

They all are starving, their only food a revolting cold jelly made from the boiled hides along with the soup of desiccated bones. The children have started cutting off small pieces of a rug placed near the fire, toasting them, and eating the crispy fragments. They eat anything they can find, including mice, pinecones, and the cardboard covers of books, the pages already burned for fuel because firewood is scarce.

Levinah dozes and sees herself, her children, and their families walking a dry, bright path along a stream bank speckled with green. The sun warms their skin, and she shivers in her semi-consciousness, drinking up the heat. Glistening apples slip from

the sky into her outstretched hands; she tastes the sweet seediness of strawberries. She shudders as a thousand jewels stud the sky with rainbows. Her breathing quickens. Outside, gray wolves pace a smooth path beneath the evergreens. They echo the howling wind and wait.

I have a confession to make: I am a ghoul.

According to the *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, a ghoul is “an evil demon” who feeds on humans and robs graves. I will admit to a mild interest in the occult as a teenager, probably instilled during 12 years of Catholic school, coupled with repeated viewings of *Rosemary's Baby* and *The Exorcist*. I've also wandered through my fair share of cemeteries. But I don't have a diabolical bone in my body nor have I ever considered physically harming anyone, even after a boyfriend dumped me for a younger woman. And the graveyard shifts I worked over the years didn't leave much time for field trips.

What speaks to me is the last part of the definition: “someone who revels in what is revolting.” Because for the past 16 years, I've been obsessed with the Donner party, the “ill-fated” group of emigrants who took an unproven shortcut to California and found themselves stranded in the Sierra Nevada Mountains during the winter of 1846–47; dying of starvation, most ate human flesh to stay alive.

The story is a gruesome tale of survival cannibalism—one of the most famous tragedies in western US history—more notorious than that of the country's only convicted cannibal, Alferd Packer, who confessed to killing and eating five of his companions after they became snowbound in Colorado's Rocky Mountains while on an expedition looking for gold in 1874.

Perhaps you remember the Uruguayan soccer team who cannibalized their teammates after their chartered plane crashed in the Andes Mountains in 1972, saw one of four feature films about them, or read one or both best-selling books: *Alive: The Story of*

the Andes Survivors (1974) or *Miracle in the Andes* (2006). Cannibals made headlines in the late 1960s, '70s, and '80s, so it is possible you heard about Jeffery Dahmer, Russia's Andrei Chikatilo, or Japan's Issei Sagawa. As a boy, Dahmer liked to kill animals and burn the flesh off their bones with acid. He said he liked the sound that the bones made. Dahmer, who died in 1994, killed at least 17 men and boys. Chikatilo murdered 55 women and children in the late 1970s and 1980s. According to one Web site, he was fond of nibbling on testicles and nipples. A jury convicted Sagawa of killing a woman he lured to his apartment and eating parts of her body; he served a sentence of five years in a mental hospital and was pronounced cured. Sagawa authored a number of books and appeared on the cover of a Japanese gourmet magazine.

Chikatilo's story begins with a tale of cannibalism brought on by starvation. During Josef Stalin's rise to power in the Soviet Union in the early years of the 20th century, millions of people starved to death. As a boy, Chikatilo said his mother told him that during a famine, villagers killed and ate his older brother, Stepan, warning him not to stray from the yard or else he might be eaten too.

If none of these stories sounds familiar, perhaps you recall seeing the staggering zombies of *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), Leatherface from *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* (1974), or the suave, smooth-talking Hannibal Lecter of *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) and *Hannibal* (2001). I would argue that today's movie audiences are no different from the crowds that flocked to World's Fair exhibits of reported cannibals from the South Pacific and West Africa in the early 1900s. We are all voyeurs, curious about those radically different from ourselves.

What would you think if I told you that I was obsessed with the Donner party? Would you give me a look as blank as a snowdrift—like my husband, Dan, does when I bring up the subject—or make some snide remark about what's past is over so I'd best forget it? Perhaps you would wonder if I watched too many horror movies as a young adult. Then again, maybe you would blame my interest on an overactive imagination or a

familiarity with dead things.

It could be all or none of the above.

My obsession began with a videotape.

As I walked through the newsroom where I had just started a six-month photography internship, an unboxed videotape caught my eye. The tape was on top of a low bookcase covered with daily newspapers and unsolicited books, videotapes, and cassettes. Usually I hardly gave the pile a second glance, but that day a plain white label held my attention: *The American Experience* #503 “*The Donner Party*.”

Knowing what I know now, I would like to say that the sight of the tape sparked something deep inside my body. Perhaps one of my childhood picture books told the story of how one emigrant family traveled in a wagon so big they called it the “Pioneer Palace Car.” Maybe I learned about the heroic efforts to save the group in a high school American studies class. It would be easy to tell you that my breathing quickened and my heart fluttered, but I don’t remember it that way. As I picked up the tape, I knew I would keep it. Still, I had to be sure that no one needed it for a story.

I walked over to the city reporter who sat nearby. “Hey Mike,” I said, waving the tape in his direction so that no one else could see it. “Is it OK if I take a look at this?” “I’m on deadline,” Mike said without looking up. “I don’t care what you do with anything.”

I took the tape into the darkroom, where I hid it in the zippered pocket of my camera bag. I didn’t have a television and wasn’t sure when I would be able to watch the tape. I only knew that I had to have it.

At the time, I could think of no obvious explanation for what I had done except that stories of manifest destiny gone wrong meshed with my ongoing fascination with the West. As a child, I roamed the paved spaces of northeast Ohio suburbia wearing an outfit worthy of Annie Oakley: a turquoise and black shirt with fake mother-of-pearl buttons,

a black circle skirt with white fringe, a black felt hat with a red star embroidered on the front, and shin-high black boots with cutouts shaped like crescent moons and stars. Even then, I knew that outcasts wore black.

I had guns too. My favorite gleamed in the sun, sending bullets of light into my enemy's eyes. My hand clutched an angled, white plastic grip embossed with curlicues and other western motifs. The chamber opened wide enough for a roll of caps to fit inside, but I rarely used it as a cap gun; caps stunk and were not reliable—why pay for whole rolls of caps when only half of them went off?

Although I preferred *Combat* to *Gunsmoke*, on Saturdays I tuned in to Quick Draw McGraw cartoons and reruns of *Death Valley Days* and *Wagon Train*. Every week some hapless pioneers got into trouble and needed saving. The not-so-subtle lesson of those old television shows underscored how being prepared often separated the living from the dead.

But the Donner party? As I watched the video that first time in the comfort of my living room, I couldn't help but notice how the sum of many small delays over a period of five months equaled being caught just shy of a mountain pass when the first snowstorm of the season hit. In my mind, they missed crossing over safely by moments, though in actuality, it took longer. Afterward, the inevitable march of days—of hunger, starvation, despair, death. How could they have let this happen? How could they have been so ill prepared?

I began reading about them, from the first published book-length account, Charles F. McGlashan's *History of the Donner Party* (1880), to George R. Stewart's critically acclaimed *Ordeal by Hunger* (1936). My head swam trying to keep all the details straight, but I relished the twists and turns as I would a gripping plotline. Maybe it was because so many things went wrong. Their journey became a raging bonfire that fed off each weary bone as if it were dried kindling: the first death, Margret Reed's mother, Sarah Keyes; the grunt of road building in the Wasatch; the unforgiving deserts; the layovers at Fort

Bridger, Pilot Spring, and Truckee Meadows; the death of John Snyder and James Reed's banishment in Nevada; the snowstorm while they inched toward the summit; the long winter near Truckee Lake.

A few years later, I stopped at the Emigrant Trails Museum at Donner Summit in California while driving to a new photojournalism job in Coos Bay, Oregon. I felt strangely self-conscious as I walked the shaded path through the campsites, studied the mountainous terrain, and read the memorial plaque affixed to a large boulder used as a cabin wall. In the museum, I remember a display with a replica of the tiny wooden doll Martha (Patty) Reed carried in her apron hem, and I bought a copy of Mabel Chapman's *At Great Price: The Story of Tamsen Donner* (1992), one of a string of books mythologizing the group's most famous female member.

The next year, 1996, I began collecting newspaper articles about the sesquicentennial of the tragedy and pondered whether I might attend any of the planned activities. I poured over schedules of bus tours, family reunions, and presentations and learned about other men and women, not descendants, similarly obsessed. People like Bill Pugsley, who walked the entire Hastings Cutoff with his horse and dog, and Frankye Craig, author of a book on Tamsen Donner, who organized the 150th anniversary event. It didn't take long for me to conclude that, unlike Pugsley and Craig, I was not THAT interested in the Donner party. Unlike them, I would not spend money on an event I had no business attending.

After moving back to Utah the following year, I found a book of reprinted newspaper articles from a year-long series published in the Reno *Gazette-Journal* written by Frank Mullen Jr. titled *The Donner Party Chronicles: A Day-By-Day Account of A Doomed Wagon Train, 1846–1847* (1997). I studied the historical black-and-white photos and the newly commissioned color ones of the trail. Especially intriguing was a location known as the Parting of the Ways, where the road toward Fort Bridger and the Hastings Cutoff branched off the original Oregon Trail. I recalled a similar photograph from Ric

Burns's documentary film showing a few lone wagons separating themselves from the heavy traffic on the main road. This single photograph held my attention; it captured the idea of the road less traveled, of moving into unknown territory. Robert Frost wrote "The Road Not Taken" 74 years after the original members of the Donner party left Springfield, Illinois. To them, certainly, choosing the less popular route "made all the difference."

I wondered if the idea of choosing an unproven road is what drew me to them. I thought of my ancestry but found no pioneer connection. Both of my grandparents emigrated from Eastern Europe just after the start of the 20th century and immediately settled in Cleveland, Ohio, which had a sizable Hungarian population, where they became steelworkers and raised large families.

Invariably, authors referred to the group as the "ill-fated" Donner party, a phrase that bothered me. Was their downfall predestined? Yes, they made errors in judgment. In Utah, near what is now East Canyon, Hastings left them a note advising them to find another way around Weber Canyon. Why, when they confronted Hastings a few days later, did they assume the vague route he pointed to would be better than the bad one he had just traveled? I wonder about why they trusted Hastings after he lied to them.

In the end, it didn't matter. They were on their own, and if their journey proved anything, it was that you never know the consequences of your actions until long afterward. All the perhaps-ing in the world wouldn't help me understand why their journey fascinated me.

I convinced the features editor at the Ogden *Standard-Examiner* newspaper, where I then worked, to let me write a travel essay about the Hastings Cutoff in Utah, where the Donner party's troubles began. I reasoned that following the actual trail walked by the pioneers would allow me to get to the bottom of my obsession. For two days in October 2002, a friend and I drove the cutoff from Fort Bridger, Wyoming, to the Silver Island Mountains, just east of the Nevada border. Reservoirs, highways, and neighborhoods obliterated much of the original trail yet we thrilled to the thought

of finding actual wagon ruts. We knew we were on a pilgrimage following the path of doomed angels.

Our voyage of discovery—finding a pass through the north end of the Cedar Mountains, examining one museum’s rusty relics that may have been part of a cache abandoned in the desert west of Great Salt Lake, and discovering an orchard of ripe apples on the edge of the salt flats—did not lead to any revelations. The only conclusion I could offer struck me as I joined the modern-day wagon train speeding along I-15 toward Ogden. I remembered a comment made by the volunteer who showed us around the museum in Grantsville, a place that has seen much change in the years since the Donner party passed through. “History is close to the surface here,” he said. I wrote, “Yes, we do change the landscape we live in, sometimes in terrible and unforeseen ways. I’m saddened that so many places rarely go undiscovered, and vow to keep my own secret places well hidden.”

Was I telling myself to lay low for a while and not worry about coming to any conclusions? The trip assuaged my interest for a while. For the most part, I focused on my new job. But every year around Halloween, my thoughts returned to the video. *It’s time*, I would think. Time to make a big bowl of buttered popcorn, open a bottle of cabernet, and put on my warm down booties. Of course, I had to wait until Dan was gone so as not to subject myself to his for-better-or-for-worse remarks. No, I always watched the video alone. Sometimes I watched it more than once a year. Sometimes I skipped a year. Invariably, the film tugged at me like a restless wind.

I loved the moody scenes from the dead of winter. Orange flames crackled and sparked in spooky slow-motion as a female voice—a member of the so-called “Forlorn Hope” of 15 men and women making one last desperate attempt over the summit—explains the moment when the subject of cannibalism is broached. Or the dreamy, drifting snowflakes that thickly fell like a torn goose down pillow as a heavily accented male voice read entries from Patrick Breen’s diary. I found undeniable comfort in their story; why else would I keep revisiting it?

The Donner party was on my mind as I completed my application for graduate school at Utah State University in winter 2006. In the essay that accompanied my application I wrote, “Although all of us inhabit history, most of us find it an inaccessible maze of slot canyons and goosenecks, never fully connecting with our own tiny world, let alone the rest of humanity. I want to peel back the onionskin layers of history and connect the dots, personally and culturally. Why am I obsessed with the Donner party when I grew up in the suburbs of northeast Ohio?”

Why indeed? I looked up synonyms for the word *obsess*; they include “possess, control, haunt.”

My current obsessions (besides the Donner party):

1. Black raspberries
2. Wooden roller coasters
3. Tex Avery cartoons
4. O’Keefe and Merritt gas stoves
5. Grade school reader books from the 1940s and 1950s
6. *Perry Mason* re-runs
7. Pretzels and sour cream

When flashes of insight occurred, I recorded them on scraps of paper I threw into an unmarked folder. The month after my road trip I wrote,

I need to make sense of this yearning, as if all the years have compressed and hardened into something tangible, real. There is something in me that needs to tell this tale. It’s about finding your way home. I know it sounds crazy. ... Perhaps it’s a little like what all emigrants felt starting out on the journey, a mix of desire and dread, willingness and surrender. There is some shared connection here. Some basic thing I can’t name. I only know I must follow the path until the message is clear.

Another note, one word written in block letters: “FATE.” Or this one: “There are those who walk the named trail.” Except I misread it and thought that I wrote, “There are those who walk the same trail.”

Two years later, I wrote four words on a weekly movie schedule for the Lewiston Community Theatre in Lewiston, Utah, that stunned me. It must’ve been the week of Valentine’s Day because the schedule is printed on pink cardstock with clip art of a bannered heart pierced by an arrow. The Mormon-themed comedy *Baptists at our Barbecue* shared the stage with *Finding Neverland*, about the creation of *Peter Pan*, the week that I wrote: “extraordinary circumstances, unfathomable LOSS.”

Though we like to think that we behave more like heroes than villains, we are unable to compete with heroic historical figures. We consider ourselves smarter, more thoughtful, stronger, and more accepting. Yet look at us; look at our lives. How many of us sail through life unencumbered by death, pain, illness? Those four words reminded me that we all share the emotional pain of heartbreak, of expectations unfulfilled. We spend our lives negotiating the terms of happiness. Sometimes we lose. I, more than most, understand how stepping off the path changes your life.

Like the Donner party, I am familiar with trauma. My father died when I was 12, and my mother was so debilitated by a series of strokes that for years she didn’t leave the house. My mother’s oldest sister, Frances, raised me. Yet I remember a childhood rich with explorations into the nearby woods and building cities of Matchbox cars in my birch-tree backyard world. Hadn’t I overcome those losses by my early teens?

It seems instructive to note that in my house, we kept our emotions in check. I didn’t feel unwanted, but I longed for a spontaneous hug or kiss, laughter, singing. We weren’t allowed to raise our voices. If we did get angry, we paid for it—in cash. Every member of the family had to put 25 cents in the wooden Shut Up Box, whenever he or she spoke those words. You contributed to the Grouch Club Box if you were crabby or did something my father or mother deemed impolite. The idea was to use the loose

change to fund family outings, but after an initial influx of cash, our obedience kept the boxes empty.

I rebelled quietly in high school. If you didn't know me, you might not have noticed that I snuck out to my car at lunch to smoke cigarettes, skipped class to go to the park and smoke pot, and drank beer at my friends' houses then drove home drunk. On the surface, I was a good student, editor of the yearbook, and a budding photographer. But surrounded by nuclear families, my absent parents marked me as different. A profound sadness followed me like a dark cloud. I became pregnant and had abortions—twice. I rode my bike miles from home to a park where I spent hours in the woods looking for flying squirrels and wildflowers. I painted watercolors, played piano, wrote poetry, took pictures. I let my lifeboat drift toward open water, anticipating wonders on distant shores.

I met my future husband at a local grocery store while shopping with my aunt. Dennis and I started dating and immediately became a couple. When I left for my freshman year at Kent State University in the fall of 1977, I planned to major in photo illustration and work as a photographer. But the week after school began, Dennis broke his back in a car accident, damaging his spinal cord; he had no feeling below his navel and faced a long period of recovery. I spent weekends at the rehabilitation hospital, ignoring my homework, snuggling with him in the awkward Stryker bed frame that immobilized his spine. The nurses said we made a cute couple. When he asked me to marry him several weeks after the accident, I said yes. With both hands gripping the sides of the boat, I rode the bucking waves like a bareback rider.

My family moved to Minnesota, and I moved with them. By that time, Dennis lived in San Jose, California, where he had gone for an operation to stabilize his weak spine. I followed him a few months later, settling into a routine of low-paying jobs operating photo-packaging machines for several national labs. I wasn't happy but didn't see how I could leave my husband. I cultivated grumpiness, drank too much Jack Daniels on weekends, and accepted the fact that sex would be infrequent and unfulfilling.

Then Dennis started having trouble with his balance. He would forget how to get out of bed and almost burned his arm when he touched a burner on the stove and couldn't feel the heat. A few weeks later, after being admitted to the hospital, he would stop talking in mid-sentence, his thoughts wiped away. Deep inside his skull, just above his left ear, a tumor blossomed. Surgery to examine it damaged his speech and memory. Six weeks of radiation and months of chemotherapy followed. His parents moved nearby to help me care for him. I quit working, and we lived on Social Security checks and a small inheritance from my father. Two years after his diagnosis, Dennis edged into a coma and died one night in a hospice, a few hours after I visited him.

The storm of his illness had tossed me to a foreign country, but in that place, I could see the chance for a fulfilling life. It might sound selfish, but I came to accept his tumor as an opportunity. Instead of cheating on him, divorcing him, or lying about my feelings, all I had to do was wait. I still loved him and did all I could to comfort him, but it was as if I had to go out to sea until after he died. I returned to a desolate landscape.

Everything around me looked the same, but I had changed. I held that bleakness within and let the wind tear through my soul. Alone, I trusted that I would find my way toward something better, but I could only put one foot in front of the other and not think of where I was going. Like a lone wagon train on a trail strewn with golden leaves, the snap of frost in the air.

When loss hits you on an uninterrupted and unrelenting basis, security becomes tenuous. You become afraid of possibilities. I thought my life would be uneventful, that I would never move far from my hometown. Then I lost my father. I cultivated an interest in Frank Sinatra and Nat King Cole and studied the stars, a remnant of his former life as a navigator during World War II. Then my mother's strokes chimed with the intensity of a cathedral bell. I stopped eating hot dogs and fried chicken and exercised vigorously to keep my arteries healthy, my brain free of blood clots. Seven years later, Dennis crashed

his car. I avoided driving at night and experimented with self-medication. Once doctors diagnosed his tumor, I preached the value of helmets and became a straight-A student, finishing my bachelor's degree in industrial arts two years after he died. I could look back on those days and say my obsessions stemmed from a defensive attitude toward fate. Perhaps I was flirting with control. I know I didn't like to depend on my friends for a ride home or a sympathetic ear.

I was kind to myself, even it meant temporarily hurting my health, my relationships, my peace of mind. I felt entitled to do whatever it took to get through the day, the month, the year. I always made it home in one piece, safely ended pregnancies I wasn't prepared for, and learned which drugs agreed with me (amphetamines, red wine) and those that didn't (acid, crack). As the years passed, I knew that the only sure thing in life is uncertainty.

I stand at the edge of the salt flats and look to a horizon of unbroken lines—cobalt blue and brilliant white—the earth as shiny as spilled milk, stretching to the torn scraps of distant mountains folded above the haze. The wind tugs at my ears, dragging on soil pockmarked by bubbles and boils as if it were alive, driving the salt across my skin, tangling my hair, whining like a fussy child. For four days and nights, the 87 members of the Donner party will walk across this salt desert looking for water. During that time, their cattle will run off, crazed with thirst. They will abandon wagons mired to the hubs in the mucky playa. Each man, woman, and child—nearly half are children—too tired to continue, but they cannot turn back. There is no time to feel ashamed for believing the lies of Lansford W. Hastings, author of the guidebook that set them on this path. His rotten words pieced together from a note pecked apart by birds: “2 days—2 nights—hard driving—cross—desert—reach water.” They don't know yet that the cattle and wagons and possessions lost will be nothing compared to the time lost. These precious hours will prove their undoing. But they don't know that yet. All they know is to keep walking.

The long, dry drive will nearly break the once-wealthy Reed family, resulting in the loss of two wagons and all but two oxen. Others loan cattle to pull their remaining wagon and offer to take some of their possessions into their own rigs, but much of the family's goods will be cached in the middle of the desert.

How does one decide what to take and what to leave behind? Are yards of colorful calicos and shiny trinkets to sweeten land deals and soothe angry Indians worth more than a child's wooden doll? Martha (Patty) Reed will disobey her mother's order to leave her toys behind, secreting a tiny doll, a salt cellar, and a lock of her grandmother's hair in her apron hem.

It could fit inside a manila envelope: what's left of my father, mother, favorite aunt, and first husband—artifacts I'd grab if my house was on fire, after my cats and my laptop—memories I'd keep of a life so distant it's as if it happened to someone else. Of course, I have more in my bedroom closet: boxes of photographs, home movies, and reel-to-reel tapes; a gilt-edge Hungarian Bible and holy cards, World War II medals, steel pennies and Beatles dolls. But over the years and after countless moves across the country, I've consolidated those mementoes into what fits into the palm of my hand—relics as light as a feather but heavy with meaning.

Of my father, Ernest, I have a small, spiral notebook with a brown cover—a record of his 30 bombing missions over Germany in early 1944. Each page, written neatly in pencil, details the date, primary and secondary targets, weather, plane name and position, bombing load, and a few sentences about the success or failure of the numbered mission. His wartime experience, something he never spoke of, comes alive when I read those yellowed pages. He becomes a man, not just my father.

I don't wear the wedding and engagement rings of my mother, Marie—a set that looks identical to others I've seen from the 1940s—yellow gold bands studded with diamonds, one round-cut stone set between two smaller stones on the engagement ring

because I don't wear gems. Their simplicity reminds me of her personality both before and after the strokes that began when I was five.

One of Aunt Fan's tatted hankies protects my mom's rings. The white linen square features a lacy border of four petaled loops joined by a scalloped edge. Her tatting taught me how to be strong without saying a word, though efforts to teach me always ended in failure when I pulled the thread into tight knots. She couldn't loosen them because she never made mistakes.

Dennis's first brain surgery released a swarm of words that beat like bats against the inside of his skull. To deal with his aphasia, I made a notebook of familiar photographs and pictures cut from magazines. Dennis also sketched pictures—detailed ones of cereal boxes and cartoon characters—illustrating esoteric objects and ideas. One of my favorites is a series of three drawings. The first shows a man wearing a shirt embroidered with the name “Bob” carrying a small box. The second zooms in on the pocket of the shirt, with what looks like a pen hanging alongside a button sewn to the pocket with a tiny x. The third drawing reveals that the pen is actually a tire pressure gauge, with tiny squiggles replacing the numbers on the barrel. Dennis would spend hours on these drawings; they are his voice transferred to paper—thoughtful and exact—a crimson artery on a roadmap snaking toward an unimaginable destination.

I find additional answers in the memoirs of Donner party survivors such as Eliza P. Donner Houghton, three years old when heavy snows trapped her family. It took her 13 years to write her 1879 memoir *The Expedition of the Donner Party and Its Tragic Fate*, published more than 30 years after the survivors walked to safety. In her preface, she acknowledged the significance of writing about the tragedy that befell them and why it took so long to do so: “Who better than survivors knew the heart-rending circumstances of life and death in those mountain camps? Yet who can wonder that tenderest recollections and keenest heartaches silence their quivering lips for many years.” She

admitted that being “blessed with the sunshine of peace and happiness” gave her the time to collect her thoughts and interview other survivors. That we both chose to write about childhood trauma from the safety of middle age struck me as significant.

At first, I thought what appealed to me about the Donner story was how life turned when you didn’t expect it. Who expects her mother to spend years in bed recuperating from a series of strokes? Or that her husband would never walk beside her, please her in bed, or need to communicate by drawing pictures? I say this with some trepidation because I assume that others accept life’s twists and turns more easily than I did. It took years for me to build resentment over missed relationships and opportunities. I don’t apologize for feeling the way I do. I did my best, but I was young and tired of feeling old. I didn’t relish my role as caretaker, though I did it just the same.

Like Levinah Murphy, dreaming in the confines of her cabin, I, too, have waited. I spent years waiting for my life to begin. Then one day, people around me stopped falling ill and dying. I stopped worrying about what would happen if... At the same time, my Donner party obsession quieted, though it has never disappeared completely.

I used to think of them on winter nights when dusk came early and snow fell fast. I would look out the window and imagine being among them. Did my bones ache after the failed attempts to cross the summit? Was I snowblind from spending so much time within the cave-like shelters? Did I hear the desperate cries of the starving babies? Was the taste of gluey boiled hides and crunchy bones fresh in my mouth?

No. What I thought about most is what happened to them after they walked out of the mountains and into the rest of their lives. What would it be like to live through long days in the sunny valleys with loving families close by and a fully stocked larder? What would it be like to live with secrets so big that to tell them would be riskier than walking from Illinois to California?

In the history books, their sufferings always overshadowed their successes. The

Reeds and Breens, who survived the winter with families intact, became prominent business- and landowners. Others, like the Graveses and the Keseburgs, would find happy endings more elusive. We can't help but separate survivors into those who succeed and those who fail—it's less messy that way. Wallace Stegner, in Burns's film, likens the story to a Greek tragedy: "It's a great test of human character. Some people came through it heroically and some of the people in that party were far from heroes and they got worse as the conditions got worse, so that it was as if the sheep and the goats, the blessed and the unblessed, sorted themselves out against a background of terrible hardship and tragedy." What Stegner neglects to mention, perhaps because it hits too close to home, is how events beyond our control continually test our vulnerability. We never imagine ourselves in tragic situations, but honestly, we live through them all the time. Think of those touched by sexual and physical abuse or anyone faced with the loss of parents, siblings, spouses, friends. Are their wounds any less traumatic than those of the Donner party?

In time, I realized that I, too, possessed the tenacity of survivors like Martha (Patty) Reed Lewis, who attended the dedication ceremony for the Pioneer Monument at Donner Pass in 1918 when she was 80. A photograph taken the day of the event shows Lewis gazing across the waters of Truckee (now Donner) Lake. Her figure blends into the foliage so that she appears to be a part of the landscape that engulfed her family. Perhaps that is all that anyone can hope for from life: that we find a connection to the land that sustains us and gives us room to grow.

For years, I have known people who listened to my life story and told me that if faced with similar trials, they would snap like old bones. *I'm not as strong as you*, they'd say. *I couldn't do what you did*.

I want to tell them about my obsession. I want to tell them that if they must face something too terrible for words, they will wait. They will wait as long as it takes until spring arrives. You may not believe me, but if my obsession with the Donner party has

taught me anything, it is to listen to the ghosts when they come calling. Ghosts never speak without a reason. Listen to them. Only when you hear the ghosts of loss will you understand that you, too, can overcome the unspeakable.

THE CROSSING

My heart is big with hope & impatient with desire.

—Tamsen Donner, letter to her sister, Betsey, November 15, 1824

White. As far as he can see. I imagine him squinting through the blue haze of sunset at the wavering hulks of islands floating above what could be the moon, could be the barren ground that once surrounded his beloved home on the Salton Sink. A breeze tugs at his hat, unfurls a ribbon of pipe smoke. The sting of salt in his eyes takes him back, to his mother's kitchen perhaps. Leaning against his camping rig, he rests his right hand on a bony hip to contemplate the ghosts of his past, mirages that linger in his mind like the islands on the horizon.

I dream his mother as she sits on the edge of her bed in a gauzy nightgown and soft leather slippers brushing her hair slowly and deliberately, the one thing she wouldn't let the servants do. I see her elegant profile in the half-light of the oil lamp, partially obscured by her honeyed hair. His father is there, too—a dark smear, not fully formed.

Closing his eyes, he remembers the thick brocades of the sitting room tapestries, the soft carpet that muffled every step, the painted and patterned walls and ceilings that pressed in on him like a great anchor—of responsibility and expectations. He left as soon as he could. He does not miss his family or the rich life he left behind.

What he does miss is the sea—the vastness of it, the blue-black deep as mysterious as the schools of cod he used to chase—roiling one minute, calm as glass the next. Full of treasures just below the surface. Sparkling fish. Shipwrecked bounty. Freedom.

He struggled at first, 16 and inexperienced but with a fierce desire to see what lay beyond the shipyard and the brownstones of Back Bay. He quickly learned to bait hooks, set trawl lines, and gut fish writhing a foot thick on the slippery deck. He knew where the rocks lay just offshore, holding the ship steady when the sea rocked as if to break the

schooner in two, how to piece together sea and sky into a home. The men became his family, and he rode the wave of their laughter like a baby in a cradle.

He opens his eyes and spies one star rising above the gunmetal blur of the Wasatch. In his journal, he will later write: “A bright, clear sky in the distance, a few light showers before dark with one light squall from the northwest last evening that wet the desert in spots. No sleep. These men, mostly young, told some wonderful stories until daylight.” Yes, besides the men, I think he would say that it is the stories that matter most. He reminds himself to talk to as many old-timers as he can on his journey tracing the route of the Donner party across the West.

Why is honoring the pioneers so important to him? What is this salt that thickens the sea and lodges in his heart? He knows how easy it is to drown, how waves of emotion can submerge you until your lungs are so full that you are breathless.

He pushes the disquieting thought away and knocks the tobacco from his pipe with a quick tap of his wrist, watching ashes scatter. Nearby, a warm glow casts a net around the group of men he considers his friends. His boot heel softly scratches a mark into the ground as he turns to join them. The fire spits sparks. Below, ghosts gather.

I first met Capt. Charles E. Davis while paging through a special edition of *Overland Journal* devoted to “Dreadful Accidents.” The issue of the quarterly journal of the Oregon-California Trails Association featured several articles about the Donner party accompanied by a few photographs of Davis from a 1927 automobile trip following their route. The captions were pithy, the photos unextraordinary. In them, Davis, always wearing a cowboy hat and sometimes an overcoat, faces away from the camera. His body a survey marker, his arms compass needles, pointing out the directions the wagons moved. At the time, I thought it strange that he chose to hide his face, but the purpose of the photographs seemed to be the trail, not the man traveling it.

I thought nothing more about Davis until a trip I planned in June 2008 to

view photographs from the Martha J. (Patty) Reed Lewis Collection at Sutter's Fort State Historic Park in Sacramento, California, fell through. Deep into my obsession with the group of emigrants who fell behind on an unproven shortcut to California and spent a tragic winter in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, I thought that studying old photographs of this family of survivors might provide reasons for my own interest. A former photojournalist, I looked at photographs the way an astronomer studies the stars: I read them for answers. Photography critic Susan Sontag, in her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, describes the power of photography to connect each of us to a larger consciousness, "All memory is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds." But instead of clarity, I faced a rocky route of unknowns, the least of which was not being able to see the images.

Back home, in Logan, Utah, I remembered Davis's contribution. The online catalog of his collection—formally known as the Charles E. Davis Overland Trail Project Collection, also held at Sutter's Fort—listed over a thousand images. As a fellow photographer and trail enthusiast, I could not help but wonder about Davis's motivation for following this particular group of pioneers. Information on Davis was scant, but I found a 1930 book by Charles Kelly titled *Salt Desert Trails* that credited Davis with sparking the author's interest in following the early trails. I would later learn that although Davis was not the first to discover Donner party artifacts, most consider him the first person to retrace their route across the West. His interest in the Donner party, as an amateur historian and photographer, and our connection to this long-ago tragedy would soon overshadow research into my own obsession.

Davis came out of retirement to follow the emigrants' route and send what he found to Sutter's Fort for safekeeping and display. He spent thousands of dollars and the last years of his life engaged in this single-minded pursuit. Twenty-five years after his

death, author Nell Murbarger, frustrated with her inability to pinpoint the reason for his Donner party fixation, observed that “none of his people, so far as known, had taken part in that historic fiasco, nor does anyone seem to recall that Davis had expressed previously any interest in the Donner trek. Yet, this was the single episode in history he chose for his research.” Finding no obvious cause for his interest, she blames ancestral ties to a Maine Indian chief who married into Davis’s father’s family in the early days of the New England colony: “This mixture of blue blood and savage had waged a continual battle for his soul,” she wrote. Her melodramatic explanation seems far-fetched, yet it parallels how desperately we want to make sense of ugly situations that have no logical explanation.

Consider my own 16-year obsession with the Donner party, which emerged after an emotionally painful adolescence and early adulthood fueled by the death of my parents and first husband. Although my interest in the Donner party came without warning, I never once thought I was crazy or battling the proclivities of my tribe. I figured something in my subconscious wanted to be known, and until I knew what it was, I unquestioningly followed my own curiosity, even when my husband, Dan, made fun of me and friends quizzed me to exasperation. Eventually I learned the cause had everything to do with how human beings negotiate trauma and heal from deep emotional wounds. I knew that losing family members early in life contributed to a passionate interest in others who overcame hardship. The emotions I felt as a young orphan and widow—emptiness, fear, longing, sadness—matched others who grieved. Reading Murbarger’s words about Davis fueled my desire to learn all I could about this man, to redefine him in the face of our unmistakable kinship.

Next to the desk where I write are three photographs of Davis taken in the years before he died. The first shows him on the Great Salt Lake Desert in the middle of his 1927 trip. Mud and salt cover his stained, lace-up jodhpurs and boots; his right palm rests on a shovel caked with mud while the other points out of the frame. On one shoulder is

a round metal canteen in a plaid wool cover, and over the other is some kind of leather container, probably for carrying water. A bandanna pokes out of a side pocket; I'm sure it's limp with sweat and dirt. His tanned face sports deep lines, one eye squints under his battered felt hat, the brim curled up on one side like a perky woman's hairdo. His mouth, etched with dark shadows cast by the midday sun, is a grim line bisecting his tall, lanky frame. The tightness of his leather belt and the deep folds of fabric make him appear malnourished. This is a man hard at work, waiting patiently to resume his digging under the hot afternoon sun.

In a photograph that accompanies several magazine articles about his trip, Davis looks like an old-school archaeologist before an adventure, neatly groomed and posed but slightly ill at ease. He wears a dark suit coat, dark jodhpurs, white shirt, striped tie, and crisp hat, pipe clenched in the corner of his mouth; one hand casually rests in the front pocket of his pants. He stares at the camera as a dignified gentleman would—a photo for the memoirs he might write one day. I picture him polishing his worn boots to a bright shine for this photo. Unlike the desert photograph, taken while at work, here Davis waits uncomfortably for the photographer to click the shutter.

The last photograph is a postcard of Davis's café on Mullet Island, in the southeast corner of California's Salton Sea, a place he built from scratch and ran successfully for nearly a quarter-century. An adult Huckleberry Finn sits on the far right barstool, left hand on his crossed knee, right elbow on the bar. Unlike the tanned figure digging up relics on the Utah salt flats, Davis seems pale, though perhaps that is just the bright sun illuminating the bar. The interior of Hell's Kitchen reminds me of other small-town museums, crammed to the rafters with oddities of every shape and size. It's a museum devoted to Davis's life as a sea captain. That it's located on the shore of one of the saltiest bodies of water in the country in the middle of one of its harshest deserts is not only ironic but a brilliant marketing strategy. Davis, I'm now convinced, is some kind of genius.

I once built a successful soapmaking business from the ground up and ran it for almost 10 years, but comparing my business to Davis's is like comparing minnows to mackerel. We have in common fathers who died before we reached our teens coupled with the resultant family stresses. For both of us, this unease led us to search for our identities away from home.

By his own account, Davis, born in 1877, grew up in a wealthy household but wanted a simpler life devoid of the luxuries of wealth and the punishment he received for missing or falling asleep during church services. His independent streak was likely the result of his father's influence. As a sea captain and local leader of fisherman, Charles Sr. garnered respect. "Everybody knew him, everybody liked him," Davis said, recalling how his father palled around with generals and politicians. Appointed to a job as a lighthouse keeper after a Civil War injury paralyzed his right arm, he later ran what was once the largest café in Boston, the Blackstone Dining Room.

His father's industriousness did not impress his mother's family. Davis described them as a "proud and prominent merchant family—wealthy and proud"; she was one of the first to graduate from Wellesley College. Her elopement with the elder Davis forever earned her the scorn of her sisters and father, who considered him a "black sheep." After he died of pneumonia when Charlie was 10, the family sold the restaurant. To help support his mother, sister, and two brothers he joined Sol Jacobs's Atlantic fishing fleet when he was 16. He chafed at his family's demands; they expected him to send money home, and, if he didn't, no one would respond to his letters. According to Davis, they considered him "a dirty fisherman, kept out of the parlor." He tried to go straight with a job at a surety company in London, but he "got the wanderlust" and returned to Gloucester. "For some reason, [I] didn't give a damn for the money in it, [I] wanted the rough life," he told his friend, Sutter's Fort curator Harry Peterson.

At 19, I, too, was ready to take on the world. My plans to graduate from college and become a famous photographer ended when my first husband, Dennis, crashed his

car, was paralyzed from the waist down, and died from a brain tumor six years later. Who signs up for a future like that? You're damn right I chafed at the expectations thrust upon me. It was easiest to escape into alcohol and drugs and to keep my home life and my terminally ill husband a secret from everyone I knew.

After Dennis's death, I escaped into schoolwork. I rode my bike from a neighborhood springing up at the edge of a lettuce field to the downtown campus of San Jose State University, where I combined my knowledge of photography with my love of words. I outlined the decline of tigers in southern India, explored the Point Reyes lighthouse on the rocky coast north of San Francisco and photographed its amazing Fresnel lens, captured the intricate carvings of colorful carousel horses, and interviewed well-known *National Geographic* photographer Frans Lanting for my first published magazine article.

Like me, Davis wasted no time in exploring the world. He always seemed to be looking for something. In Alaska, it was gold. In South America, he studied exotic birds and animals. In Galveston, Texas, he collected fish from all over the world for his natural history museum, later destroyed in the 1900 hurricane. In Lower (Baja) California, Davis scouted for travel routes to Mexico.

As an ocean fisherman, Davis was well acquainted with catastrophic weather and how to save himself. He knew how water could boil black and tempestuous or appear as a dead-calm sheet of glass. Lost in heavy fog above the American River while chasing a polar bear and cub, he walked 300 miles to safety with only the shirt on his back and a clasp knife. Smelling the salt air of the sea, he "just slid and fell down the mts" until he reached the Arctic Ocean.

Maybe his brushes with disaster influenced his decision to settle at the base of an extinct volcano on the edge of the Salton Sink in California's Imperial Valley, where the temperature regularly hovered above 100 degrees. When the Colorado River flooded its banks in 1905, Davis built a café, marina, and dance hall on what was now Mullet Island.

Hell's Kitchen was popular with tourists, who feasted on dinners featuring his alfalfa-fed mullet, perused his desert museum (admission 25 cents), and listened to his mining songs and chanteys of his days on the sea. He created an oasis out of catastrophe, actively shaping his immediate environment—what some viewed as a hostile, lifeless desert—to sustain life. That he succeeded as well as he did is as much ingenuity as it is endurance.

He probably did it just to show others he could. Although he had no formal training in geology or biology, he conducted a scientific study of the area's bubbling mud pots and served as a wildlife guardian to wintering sea birds and other aquatic life. Some of his ideas—the sea lions he imported and the barge he trucked in and hoped to restore as a floating restaurant—sank, literally and figuratively—but he never gave up.

Like Davis, I plodded ahead with a similar determination, leaving lonely California for Minnesota, where my mother, aunt, and sister lived. I honed my camera skills, discovering that documentary photography provided me with dozens of subjects and friends who became as familiar as kin. What's more, they trusted me to represent them in an honorable way, and I thrived on their kindness. I had found another home—in the guise of many homes—that made me feel secure. It's not that I didn't love my true family, but after so many deaths and disappointments, I felt abandoned and alone. They didn't mean to hurt me but couldn't comfort me. If that doesn't make sense, perhaps you never “got the wanderlust” for a different life. Consider yourself lucky.

That the Pioneer Monument at Donner Lake inspired him tells me he respected the emigrants' sacrifice. He decided to go on the road again, this time in search of the ghosts of the Donner party. Did reading C. F. McGlashan's book *A History of the Donner Party* remind him of the times he had cheated death? Did the book make him consider the links between fate and fatality? History books abounded with dramatic tales of ships dashed against the rocks, of men—boys like he—lost at sea. In Davis's time, popular magazines and newspapers brought pioneer tales to a wide audience. And the country was on the move again.

When Davis decided to retrace the emigrants' route from a corner of Wyoming through Utah, Nevada, and California the highway system was young. McGlashan's preface might've appealed to Davis's sense of adventure: "More thrilling than romance, more terrible than fiction, the sufferings of the Donner Party form a bold contrast to the joys of pleasure-seekers who to-day look down upon the lake from the windows of silver palace cars." In his early 50s, possibly tired of entertaining and keeping his business afloat, Davis surely recognized how automobile access supported his lifestyle. Yet easing the traveler's burden also threatened to erase the historic footsteps of those who came before.

There is solace in movement. When I was a girl, I measured distance from the back seat of my parents' car, watching the slow blur of light poles. That we were going somewhere did not matter as much as moving. I was always anxious to get away. What does it mean to a child to have no center, to feel the floor give way without warning? We all negotiate crises. Some flee or fight. Some create new homes in different states or countries. I watched my family leave one by one because their bodies gave out. It is a difficult place to be as a child—strong and healthy yet defined by other bodies, those that don't last.

Early on, I learned that loss has a rhythm that could rock me to sleep as surely as the sound of a car's tires. One day you're riding your purple banana bike under a spiderweb of dogwood branches, the sun a strobe light overhead, and the next you're scuffing your feet across the thick, red carpeting of a funeral home entryway, turning somersaults with your cousins, while lines of gray-haired men pour rye whiskey into glasses and watch their wives build nests of folding chairs in front of a casket cascading with flowers. You don't feel that life will be any different than it was before—no one talks to you about it, so you wake up the next morning when birds are moving in the trees, the crocuses poke through the slushy snow, and you can't understand why your mother is silent. You wonder if she misses him. She never speaks of him. From her you learn to be silent. When your friend betrays you, when your heart breaks, you hold the

sadness inside. Years pass and sometimes you feel a tug in your chest when something shatters or you scrape your knee or your boyfriend leaves you.

You are a survivor—you know that without anyone telling you—and you do what it takes to survive. Every so often you pack up your belongings and find another town, another house, and fill it with people and possessions until, gradually, it empties. You spend your life in houses with empty rooms. You paint the walls white, open the windows—there are always windows, you can't stand rooms that are dark—and fill the space with the few people who let you laugh and cry when you need to, leave you alone when you need to be alone, dance with you, drink with you, sleep with you. You go on like this until you miss something—a ring or a picture on the wall. You look out the window, feel the breeze blowing, and know that soon it will be time to move again, because to sit still terrifies you. You don't want to watch the room empty like the others. You drive to California, Minnesota, Oregon, Utah. You drive because to sit still is to fall silent. You will not be silent. You fill notebooks and journals and letters and computer files with words that must be written. Your consciousness bathes in a shower of sparks that explodes mysterious and unbidden, like bubbles rising to the surface of a mountain lake. Deep within your heart, in a tangle of crumpled dreams, lies the sparkling fish of memory that suddenly leaps toward the sun, unburdened and wondrous.

My house in Richmond, Utah, is located at the eastern edge of a fort built by Mormons in the early 1860s to keep the inhabitants safe from Indians. Digging in the yard often uncovers shards of blue-on-white china, rusted square nails, metal keys, and, once, an oddly shaped silverplated teaspoon. I study each artifact as if it consciously chose to appear at my feet, marvel at how what we bury eventually finds its way to the surface. These broken bits of history speak loudly to archaeologists, pot hunters, and explorers like Capt. Charles Davis; or maybe it's because they listen more acutely to the lessons of the past than the rest of us.

On the trail, Davis possessed an uncanny ability to find relics. Men said he would get down on his hands and knees and sniff the ground to find the charcoal remains of old campfires. On the salt flats, Davis uncovered wheels and iron parts from what he believed was the Reed family wagon along with the bones of yoked oxen. At the Donner Lake camp, he discovered an axe blade Lewis Keseberg lost when it flew off its handle and jammed in the fork of a tree branch. Davis also found the unmarked graves of early Donner party casualties Luke Halloran and John Snyder.

While Davis admired the group's bravery in the mountains, he wanted to show that their suffering had begun long before. "The work of the party coming through the Wasatch Mts, over the desert and thro Nevada is just as interesting and about as tragic as that of the lake," Davis wrote. "They had no applauding public—no one to see or know what they were going thro ... all they had ahead was the hope of creating a home in the wilderness." Davis could have been talking about himself.

As I learn more about Davis, I see him as someone who simply lived the way he wanted. As one of the first to settle in the Imperial Valley, he recognized the area's potential as a tourist destination, and those who knew him said he reveled in his role as a lusty balladeer and congenial host. At the same time, an archivist told me that his shyness kept him from speaking to schoolchildren about his projects. Dozens of letters to newspaper editors and historical societies, articles about his travels, and his journal refute that impression.

He stands at the makeshift easel in the early morning coolness, stirring a tobacco can of muddy brown paint that smells faintly of fish. Scattered on the table to his left are a dozen more paint-filled containers, blends of finely sifted mud pot pigments and thick, clear oil rendered from mullet. He painted all of his buildings with a similar mixture, along with his car. He assumed the townsfolk chuckled at the painted pelican extending above the front grille of his Dodge and the silhouettes of sea birds scattered above the

running board as they read the appliquéd lettering on the sides of the back compartment spelling out “Mullet Island” and “Old Trails of the West.” “There’s Cap Davis on another of his explorations,” they might have said, shaking their heads. “What a strange fellow.”

“Who will it be today?” he thinks, glancing at the darkly framed paintings lining the walls. He pages through McGlashan’s *History* remembering the story of how the Reeds killed and ate their pet dog, Cash, when their meat ran out. He settles on a scene of two of the Donner girls, Georgia and Eliza, watching their mother, Tamsen, turn and walk away, returning to the camp where her husband, George—their father—lay dying. The two would never see her again.

According to Nell Murbarger, Charlie Davis feverishly painted a series of 100 or more paintings in the three years after his trip. She muses that Davis, “scarcely taking time to eat or sleep, ... stripped canvas after canvas from the easel, madly beginning another before the paint had dried on the first,” resulting in “some of the most spectacularly haunting primitives ever conceived in America. ... Here was stark, unmitigated tragedy, human emotion stripped to the bare bone, hopelessness, fiendishness, evil and death.”

In two articles and a book, *Sovereigns of the Sage*, Murbarger tells of visiting Davis’s deserted resort nearly 20 years after his death in 1933 to find the paintings hanging on the walls, piled on tables, chairs, and the bed, and stacked on the floor. She imagines Davis trapped in the cluttered confines of Hell’s Kitchen, suffocating under the weight of tortured history: “Brought forth under terrific strain, emotional as well as physical, each succeeding canvas had drawn more deeply on the man’s failing strength, until, eventually, he realized that his fountain of endurance was about to run dry.”

Murbarger’s attitude toward Davis is peculiar considering she included him in her book because, like others she interviewed, Davis “possessed a matchless ability to *think clearly* and to carry on ably in the face of any hardship or emergency.” As “The Roving Reporter of the Desert,” Murbarger admired those “proud, courageous, self-sufficient

sons and daughters of the great Sagebrush Kingdom of the Western United States.” People, I assume, such as Davis and herself.

Murbarger, too, wanders the western landscape alone, without a spouse to tie her down; the two seem to be kindred spirits. “It may seem like a strange sort of life for a woman,” she writes, “but I enjoy it.” Why then, when faced with proof of Davis’s obsession—all those paintings!—does she conclude his behavior is irrational, even crazy? Perhaps Murbarger did not confront significant losses growing up. She writes that her two parents provided shelter, “food and warmth and games and books and love. We needed nothing more to assure our happiness.”

Perhaps Murbarger leaves out personal details that could shed light on her reaction to Davis. She admits that before she took to the road, she “burn[ed] an assortment of bridges,” a task she calls “pleasurable.” Is her inability to face parts of her own past the reason she rejects other explanations for Davis’s artwork? I don’t know enough about Murbarger to come to any conclusions, but I wonder why, after acknowledging Davis’s contribution as a “good historian and a master researcher,” she paints him in such negative terms.

Why did Davis create his art gallery? Though I have only seen three of his paintings, shown in the photographs that Murbarger took in the early 1950s, each one explores the terrain of loss. Perhaps this is how Davis navigated the changing world around him. Maybe he felt he didn’t fit in with the ongoing development around his island. His world was changing, and places like Hell’s Kitchen didn’t fit; he didn’t fit.

But what happened to Davis? Murbarger sees his paintings as a troubled man’s cry for help, a man who found peace only after he returned to his ancestral home in Massachusetts days before his death. I have found no record of Davis after 1928. No trace of his paintings exists. Davis simply disappears, but that doesn’t mean he was lost.

In his last journal entry, Davis writes that he leased his “place to a company installing a large steel derrick 75 feet in height and have 19 men there, some city. Other

than my buildings, they have built 12 or 14 homes for families of the men, only needing a school and postoffice to have a city.” Davis reports that his although his dog Prospector “got through fine and fat,” all of his geese and most of his chickens have left. “Everything I had arranged artistically has been destroyed during my absence with the intense heat of the summer. ... Filth and dirt has increased likewise with civilization. Commercial profits are in full swing.”

Five pages earlier, he describes coming to another alkali desert outside the town of Darwin, California, once a thriving freshwater lake. His comments mark his pragmatism about the effects of western “progress”:

If better sense is not shown in the future, political engineering several states of this western country will have only one city, including the whole Colorado River. Then we can have lots of Death Valleys east and south of us and many romantic tragedies such as blowing up the aqueducts etc. and the necessary slaughter of men for and against that will make wonderful romantic history for the coming generation to read up on thereby lessons to be learned. Then a new people can start in and try to reclaim those wonderful places for building prosperous homes [crossed out].

Although he sounds disenchanting, he doesn’t sound despondent. Knowing of his past, Charlie Davis was a survivor. Like Eliza Poor Donner Houghton and Martha (Patty) Reed Lewis, who died in old age long after they walked out of the mountains. Like me. There is nothing to suggest that Davis went over the edge except for Murbarger’s words.

The water swallows up the earth and makes a lake. The snow covers the ground and makes a cave. A house slips below the snow and becomes a tomb.

Or a hiding place.

The landscape of loss is a barren desert or a stretch of snow punctuated by dark trees. How do we navigate with no landmarks to guide us?

Here’s what I think happened to Charlie Davis:

Back home after months of physically demanding work, he realizes that civilization is catching up to his desert outpost and becomes restless. Rather than fight the unwinnable battle against the growing sprawl, trapped between a vital youth and an empty old age, he leases his land and leaves to find a new home. I like to think he wanted one last adventure. Barring any evidence to the contrary, this scenario is one I can accept.

Murbarger called Davis “not an important hero. ... All he did was hitch his wagon to a strange obsession, and sacrifice everything he owned—life included—that one shadowy episode in frontier history might be better understood.” Murbarger is entitled to her opinion.

In a few sentences, she dismisses all of his accomplishments. Capt. Charles Davis did more than follow a “strange obsession.” He opened up an inhospitable environment to development and strove to protect it for future generations. He educated others about the need to preserve trails and historic sites. Above all, Davis acted as a steward to wildlife that depended on the area for their migrations. He did all of these things alone, with his own funds, to pleasure no one but himself and those who depended on him.

Charles Davis will always be my hero because of our unlikely bond. Sometimes I think he is the father I wish I had: independent, adventurous, outdoorsy, strong. My father wore dark gray suits and drove a burgundy Thunderbird with automatic windows. He dirtied his brain and his lungs instead of his hands. We never went camping, and I don’t think I ever saw him in anything more informal than a plain white tee shirt. He was as different from Davis as I am from him.

Davis told Harry Peterson that most of the men were afraid of the desert, that they would anticipate losing their way even before parking their vehicles. Davis, on the other hand, knew how to find his way home; he just chose a less-popular route. I wouldn’t recommend losing the people you love to find peace, but eventually, it worked for me too.

The salt flats may seem empty, but on my last visit, ghosts appeared. From my

campsite on a small knoll near the southeastern end of the Silver Island Mountains, I watched them shimmer in the indigo twilight and join the noiseless procession of headlights arcing toward the gambling mecca of Wendover. The figures were achingly real. I think Davis saw them too.

When pioneers crossed over to a new home, they did so with confidence and as much preparation as they could muster. Sometimes they left items behind—belongings too heavy to bear. They buried them where they fell, just as they buried their dead in shallow graves scattered the length of the Overland Trail. They never abandoned the belief that they would survive. The specter of death might follow them to their beds, but most woke up to a new day. I often felt I would not wake up, but one day, I did. Our awakenings—and here I include Charles Davis—may not be as fine as those who slept comfortably, but in the blush of sunrise hope beckons to each of us.

NOVA LUNA

I live in a culture of deep and persistent faith among people whose ancestors crossed vast distances to build a Zion on earth. Unlike many Utahns, I have no pioneer ancestry and no children. I don't study Scriptures, go to church, or adhere to any defined doctrine. But I know what it's like to search for peace in an unknown and often hostile country. I buried my father, my mother, and my first husband before I turned 29. To survive, I hid my dreams deep, like precious bundles stuffed in the corner of a handcart.

I came to this place an orphan and a widow from Minnesota, a land of dark woods and lakes scattered like pearls from a broken necklace. Like the Mormons before me, and the others before them, each footstep was an act of faith.

I used to think that I would grow old and die in a two-story white clapboard house in Lyndhurst, Ohio. Instead, I wandered from west to east to north to south following men or jobs—the promise of home dangling before me like a shiny bauble or a bright, twinkling star.

I first saw the constellation Orion as a girl at my father's feet. It was a cold winter night, and we stood at the end of our suburban driveway watching the sky darken from orchid to indigo to black. Dad smoked while he talked about the heavens, his long fingers sweeping the horizon, speaking the patterns of stars by name: Betelgeuse, Rigel, Bellatrix. They were like his children, those stars.

He knew them from before I was born. In the early 1940s, my father, Ernest, desperately wanted to go to war. Too old to enlist, he lied his way into a navigator's seat on a B-17 that dropped bombs on Germany. He learned the names of the stars and how to calculate distance with a sextant. After his 30th and final mission—bombing the headquarters of a German Army division near the French coast on D-Day—he toasted victory with a bottle of scotch and prayed that the war was over.

In navigation, *dead reckoning* is the key to finding where you are. Hewitt Schlereth, in his book *Celestial Navigation in a Nutshell*, writes, “I have often thought that if a pagan could be a saint, Ariadne would be the patron saint of navigators. When she handed the end of that skein of twine to Theseus as he entered the maze to find the Minotaur, she ... hit upon the fundamental principle of navigation: If you know your way back, you are not lost.”

Unlike my father, who steered by the stars, I have no sense of direction. I get lost inside buildings and in parking lots. I can only read street maps by turning them upside-down. Topographical maps are as indecipherable to me as a mathematical equation.

I know that to be a good orienteer, you need to turn around every once in awhile to fix a landscape in your mind, but what do you do when you don't want to remember where you've been? You might hide from the world, follow someone else, or like me, continually change your surroundings. But in moving from place to place, you risk forgetting the landmarks that can guide you safely back home.

I walk the trail in late afternoon, the fading sun at my back. The shadows are soft and will soon grow heavy and dark. It is late May and the creek rushes loudly, foamy with cold mountain runoff. After 10 years of living in this small, northern Utah town, this canyon is the place I love the best.

I love it because I know it. I know where the old mine is and where the aspens begin. I know where avalanches crash down, the most likely spots to spy snakes, and where coyotes come to feed on deer carcasses dumped by hunters. Walk with me through the seasons, and I'll show you where the arnica grows thick and the side canyon where a cascading waterfall nestles under a great peak. We can follow the sweep of glacier lilies in early spring, sample delicate thimbleberries when the sun is high, and watch the fog roll over the ridgeline in late autumn.

Deep underground, fire and pressure breathe life into stone. The shifting earth

constantly nudges the younger mountains higher while the creek works hard to cut through the very old rock below. Hundreds of millions of years ago, what is now Utah was located near the equator and covered by a vast, shallow sea. The warm tropical waters nurtured a wide variety of marine invertebrates, algae, and corals. The fossilized evidence hides in these rocks in the form of ooids, trilobites, brachiopods, and crinoids. To think that this path was once a sandy beach!

Rocks, tell me a story. Tell me how the warm waters covered you when you were simple grains of sand. What did it feel like when the earth trembled and bucked and suddenly you were tumbling for what seemed like eons before you came to rest? How you sat undisturbed for millions of years. Tell me about the great floods and of the hidden springs and how they smoothed your rough edges and made you crack and fall apart. Rocks, tell me the story of how weathering and time make us who we are, and turn us into something better.

All the men in my father's family were steelworkers. They toiled beneath screaming ladles of fire until their skin turned black and they smelled like sweat and shaved bits of iron. They made large castings that weighed more than an elephant and smaller castings of clowns that swallowed coins when you moved a lever on the back.

A solar system is like a foundry. Buckets the size of the moon hold the light from 10,000 suns and spit enough dust to fill the Milky Way. The air is alive with a million stars. Stars are born when dust gathers, coalesces, and collapses into dense, hot cores of more dust and gas. The nearest star nursery is 1,500 light years away in a nebula hidden in the constellation Orion.

I am familiar with Orion because I drove beneath it every winter night for two years on my way home from work. Just recently, I baked bread at a small artisan bakery and worked with fire like my dad. Deftly slashing patterns into rising loaves with a razor blade then quickly navigating the bâtards, boules, and baguettes into the tall oven with

a long-handled wooden peel required strong shoulders, a delicate touch, and a close relationship with the worry of time and danger. Thick welding gloves helped protect me, but burn scars still pepper my hands and forearms. Baking is magic. A thick goo of flour, salt, and water transforms itself into a perfectly browned, intensely fragrant sourdough loaf. Sprinkling flour on my workbench, I made galaxies appear and reform with the flick of my wrist.

Growing up, I never imagined I would bake bread for a living. I wanted to be an astronomer but was lousy at math. I secretly hoped for a telescope to see nebulae, which in pictures looked like bright bubblegum clouds and sparkling white-hot stars. I wondered how something measured in light-years was invisible to the naked eye.

Too near-sighted to stargaze with Dad, my older sister lost interest as soon as he started a lesson. He gave up on her and when I was old enough, we headed outside. “That’s Castor and Pollux,” Dad would say, pointing to the constellation Gemini, his voice a deep pebbly rumble from years of exposure to smoke and soot. In the wan glow of starlight, I could see the sheen of Vitalis in his thinning gray hair. There were other names: Arcturus, Aldebaran, Spica. Even now, the names roll off my tongue like a long-lost language.

Why don’t parents name their children after stars? Not celebrities like Britney and Brad—there are enough of those in the world—but constellations, heavenly bodies. The idea takes root while I page through a stapled file of yellowing papers that belonged to my father titled “Star Identification.” I pause to study a list of star and constellation names and their pronunciations. Intriguingly, many names have Arabic origins. I later discover that Claudius Ptolemy, a Greek astronomer living in Egypt, devised the earliest known star catalog in the middle of the 1st century AD, translating the original Latin and Greek names into a language Arabians could understand.

Ptolemy “named” stars by where they were situated within constellations. Today’s parents, on the hunt for an unusual child’s name, might experience a disconnection

between a lyrical star name and its meaning. On the surface, Mirach seems decent enough until you learn it means *abdomen* because of its location in the lower part—the girdle—of the constellation Andromeda, known as The Chained Maiden. How about Enif (*nose*), the brightest star in the constellation Pegasus, or Fomalhaut (*mouth of fish*) in Pisces Australis? Once you know their meanings, these names are hardly inspiring; but others, such as Alnai'ir (*bright star*) and Alnillam (*string of pearls*), would make lovely girls' names. And what young boy wouldn't want the name Shaula (*sting of scorpion*) or Altair (*the flying*)?

For their second child, my parents hoped for a boy and planned to name him Samuel. Instead, they named their youngest daughter after the Roman goddess Diana, a name that means *divine*. My father had a special nickname for me: Sam.

He didn't seem disappointed that I wasn't a boy, and I didn't hesitate to act like one. Athletic and outdoorsy, I spent hours at a nearby creek with my Aunt Fan (who lived with us) picking black raspberries and playing softball and tackle football. Male playmates fought to use the toy guns in my collection, especially a metal replica of a machine gun.

I never asked my dad what he did for fun as a child. He appears studious and serious in many childhood photographs, and I imagine him spending his spare time reading books about science or working out math problems. Because my mother and all of his brothers and sisters are dead, he exists in a cardboard box in my closet as a handful of medals, a gold tie tack with his signature, folders of war records, an obituary, a reel-to-reel tape, a small lined notebook. Years ago, thieves broke into my house in Minneapolis and stole his heavy, silver Air Force ring, worn so smooth that only a faint outline of wings remained. I study a formal penmanship award that he won in the 5th grade at Lafayette School in Cleveland. The elaborately scrolled certificate mentions his "improvement in Free Movement Business Writing and Correct, Healthful Posture." Judging from the picture on the certificate, and a formal photograph taken with his

brother Jim on the day of their First Communion, it seems he favored white shirts, ties, and shiny shoes.

My grandfather told his oldest son that man would go to the moon one day, but Dad didn't believe him. The old man said, "The only thing holding us back is gravity, and one day, we'll figure it out." Was Julius flint to the tinder of his son's desire to be a foundryman and forge the stuff of stars?

I picture a boy staring up at the full moon as shiny as a dinner plate, barely visible through the tall trees lining the street in front of his house on Buckeye Road. In the houses around them, aproned women with babushka-covered pin curls spooned up plates of stuffed cabbage and veal paprikás on Formica tables set on creaky linoleum floors. In a few years, the death of his mother would eclipse his world. But for now, the spark of his father's words burned bright.

I imagine he didn't doubt the idea of going to the moon but wondered how it could be done. Years later, I followed his gaze skyward as he ran his fingers through his greased hair, took a drag off a cigarette, and imagined the impossible.

I like to visit cemeteries, especially ones deep in the countryside. I usually see them from miles away. From my years of training as a newspaper photographer, my eyes scan the landscape constantly looking for patterns of earth and sky as well as what doesn't fit, places like cemeteries.

Say it's late fall, and I'm on a two-lane road in Utah just south of the Idaho border. Fields stream past in rhythmic succession, the stubbled straw poking up like a miles-long, blonde kid's flattop. I've already noted three hawks perched on a snaking, silvery wheel line and a red tractor chugging toward a faraway barn when I see the silhouette of a metal sign arching next to a clump of trees. As I get closer, the steering wheel instinctively turns in my hands, taking me down a dirt driveway toward a black iron fence and gate. I step out of the car, glance around to see if anyone is watching

and try not to move too quickly; I can already feel my heart beating faster. Most rural graveyards are quiet and deserted, at least of living people.

In contrast, big-city cemeteries offer more elaborate headstones and crypts so densely packed you can't walk a straight line between them. Foreign cemeteries are mysterious yet accessible—only the names are unreadable. Maybe I visit cemeteries because death has shadowed me since girlhood, because to walk among the dead feels oddly familiar. Like a storybook full of tales that have the same ending, a lesson I can recite by heart.

With my first camera, I traipsed around overgrown Ohio cemeteries, the ones that the landscape was swallowing up. Thin, wooden tombstones lay split and scattered on the ground along with stubs of monuments so worn away they looked like piles of rocks. Tall grass and weeds topped a thick carpet of tangled roots and fallen branches covering up any evidence of graves.

No longer a working photographer, I now visit cemeteries with my friend Kathy, who takes pictures of abandoned homesteads to paint in watercolor. Near what was once the thriving railroad town of Kelton, Utah, we explored a cemetery that was the only obvious sign of habitation in the midst of the sagebrush. I remember the tiny lamb carved on a child's tombstone the color of dried blood and the way the wind threw sand in our faces. The carving was weathered and worn, like the memories there.

On a warm summer day in Clover Valley, Nevada, Kathy and I dodged irrigation sprinklers to study the marble city of local pioneers. The Ruby Mountains swallowed the sinking sun while birds scattered like golden coins thrown in the air. As we walked back to the car, Kathy said, "I like to go to places where no one else wants to be. You know, lonely places."

I nodded. She and I often went on road trips to historical spots off the beaten path, and packing extra gas, full-size tires, and extensive food supplies became a routine part of traveling together. I liked these out-of-the-way cemeteries because they weren't popular

with tourists. It's not that tourists don't visit cemeteries, they just gravitate toward ones with famous residents such as Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, or Billy the Kid. Who's buried where is the least of our concerns. We stopped in Kelton during a Box Elder County excursion that followed parts of the transcontinental railroad route through Utah's northwest corner. Once teeming with workers and travelers, ghosts and ghost towns now populate the area. Clover Valley is close to a pass the Donner party took as they hurried west toward the Sierras. Kathy encourages my obsession with the party of emigrants trapped in the mountains in the winter of 1846–47. "Anything new with the Donner party?" she asks then listens patiently as I detail my latest findings.

As we drove away from Clover Valley, I wondered if cemeteries are truly lonely. I don't feel lonely when I'm in them; I feel comfortable and safe, surrounded by the weight of lived history, the human stamp upon the earth.

I didn't always feel this way. I remember nothing of Calvary Cemetery on Cleveland's east side, where both of my parents are buried. Years ago, on a trip through northeast Ohio, I stayed with my godmother, Angie, and asked her about visiting my parents' grave. She warned me about the "bad neighborhood" the cemetery was in and told me that I shouldn't go there by myself. She offered to accompany me and drag her boyfriend, John, along for extra protection, but I decided instead to eat a traditional chicken paprikás dinner at a local Hungarian restaurant followed by a dessert of cherry strudel. I may not remember what my parents' grave looks like, but I never forgot Angie's fear that something unfortunate would happen to me in a place full of dead people. As sprawling and private as many cemeteries are, I just can't imagine muggers roaming through them looking for victims. Who brings money to a cemetery? At most, criminals would come away with some lovely bouquets and flower arrangements.

Every year, in the days proceeding the Memorial Day holiday, rows of plastic-potted mums in white, gold, and brown appear at the grocery store where I shop. I watch families fill their carts with plants and remember my dad, mom, sister Lynne, and aunt

buying flowers at Mayland Florist for my grandparents' graves before driving to Calvary in our burgundy Thunderbird. The tiny shop smelled like a million roses. I would beg to accompany whoever went inside just so I could stand at the counter and breathe deep. I didn't know that the holiday, originally conceived to honor Civil War veterans, changed its name 14 years before Aunt Fan was born to honor all US veterans. She called it Decoration Day, so I wound red, white, and blue crepe paper through the spokes of my purple banana bike and led an assortment of spruced-up wagons, tricycles, and bicycles on a parade around the block.

There is a name for a cemetery buff like me: taphophile, from the Greek *taphos* (grave) and *philia* (affection). Some plan vacations around visits to cemeteries to study tombstone inscriptions and symbols, take photographs, or make rubbings with wax crayons, charcoal, or chalk. Others pick up litter and rearrange toppled vases, plants, and bouquets.

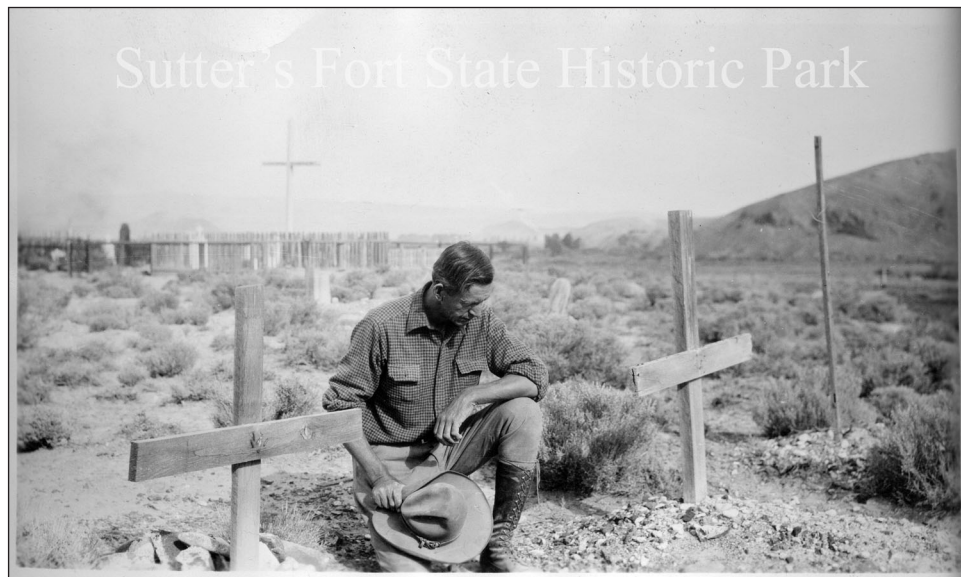


Fig. 1. “(Capt. Davis present) These unknown graves are Emer. Bound down the Humboldt River, below the Gravelly Ford, on the South side. The large cross in rear is ok Lucuida [*sic*] Duncan 17 year old Emer. Trail.”

Taphophiles have been around for years. On his trip in the late 1920s retracing the Donner party's route from Wyoming to California, Charles Davis shot a number of photographs of graves (figure 1). Many feature him kneeling in the dirt paying his respects—like so many postmortem photographs.

Families in the 19th century commonly used photographs of their dead loved ones as memorials. They were often the only evidence that someone had lived and cost very little. All classes of society could afford them. In *Secure the Shadow*, a book about postmortem and funeral photography in the mid-1800s to the early 20th century, Jay Ruby describes how such photographs “provide the mourner with a private reminder of that which cannot be changed.”



Fig. 2. Postmortem photograph in author's possession. Family, date, location unknown.

I have a photograph like this (figure 2) that I have carried from house to house as I moved around the country—as if it means something, as if the 11 people in the photograph are members of my own family. Perhaps they are, but I don't know their names. I also don't know how I came to possess this photograph or why I'm compelled to keep it. Although I am aware that memorial photography was as ubiquitous as snapshots are today, I don't know anyone else with a similar photo. I also don't know anyone else who is as familiar with death as I am.

The beige-colored mat around the photo is torn and stained, and the embossed pattern on the front has worn smooth. The image is sepia-toned, a yellowed brown that turns the shadows to chocolate, the highlights the color of sour milk.

It is daytime, probably just past noon, because the shadows are jagged and dark. The background shows an undefined sky with a line of trees reaching up. It must be midsummer: thick strands of ivy on a picket fence are barely visible on either side of the frame.

It is a child's grave; we can see that from the size of the white casket, which is open, the body a vague bundle with a scrap of darkness showing under a small bouquet of flowers. Two women and three men cluster around a gaping hole dug into the stony ground. A lattice of two-by-fours supports the casket and two children, a boy and a girl, who stand atop the jutting boards. Two babies wearing white caps and long gowns—twins, maybe?—and a girl wearing dark stockings, a large white bow in her dark hair, and sturdy shoes, complete the scene. The three men could be brothers. The women are dressed in black, their hair covered by dark babushkas.

For the photographer, the baby's death was a lucky find, an extra bit of money to supplement the portraits he took of families as he traveled throughout the area. Perhaps he learned of the death from a neighbor or friend of the dead child's parents, who saw his wagon parked on the side of the road and suggested he pay them a call. If it had been

50 years earlier, he might have posed the child as if asleep in its crib, on a daybed, or in its mother's arms. That he shot this portrait at graveside hints to it being from the 1920s or '30s, when the practice of postmortem photography was waning. By then, funeral homes had replaced home viewings and home parlors became "living rooms." In years past, a more wealthy family might create an elaborate shadowbox of dried flowers and hand-colored photographs of the child or tuck a plait of the child's hair into a silver or gold locket along with a small photograph. Mourning jewelry and clothing were common during the Victorian era, when etiquette required widows to mourn for two and a half years, most of those wearing a layer of black mourning crape that was gradually removed as the months passed.

The photographer reminds his subjects to be still, but the young boy in the foreground cannot keep from closing his eyes. The sun is too bright, and he blinks. In the back right corner is a woman who resembles my father, which makes me think this photograph belonged to his family. She has his broad face, thick nose, and close-set eyes. Her eyes, the eyes of everyone in the photo, stare at me intently. There is a hardness there. Brows furrowed, mouths thin, dark lines. This is a photograph of edges, of a crossed border. "Look," these eyes say. "Look and know this tearing away from life. Look and see this baby's death."

I have no one to ask about the photo. My grandparents, parents, aunts, and uncles, all dead. I will never know the names of this silent family or who they are. They are familiar yet out of reach, like so much of my life.

Where I imagine raw grief, author Geoffrey Batchen recognizes something else: the fear of our own mortality. In *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, he writes:

As historical artifacts residing in the present, these photographs have ... come to represent ... the specter of an impossible desire: the desire to remember, and to be remembered. ... For these photographs remind us that memorialization

has little to do with recalling the past; it is always about looking ahead toward that terrible, imagined, vacant future in which we ourselves will have been forgotten.

How to remember my father? He was at work so often and at home so infrequently. When I wake up in the middle of the night I hear his deep cigarette voice, watch his fingers trace the constellations, smell his Sunday morning breakfasts of bacon, scrambled eggs, and rye toast rubbed with garlic. But if you asked me what kind of man he was, I can only recall his funeral Mass at St. Clare's Church and his flashy car with the automatic windows.

How to remember my mother? She laughed easily but mostly while watching TV. Stroke-addled and overweight, she never told me my father was dying and sent me to a psychiatrist instead of encouraging my creativity, my intellect, my athleticism. In my mind, she is stumbling, choking, far away.

How to remember my first husband? I married Dennis before I turned 21, after the car accident that broke his back but before the brain tumor that killed him. I fell in love with his red hair and thick moustache the color of wild plums, his easy laugh, his fearlessness. In the end, he couldn't walk, couldn't make love, and couldn't talk. Why remember months of hospitals and bed bags, bowel programs and bedsores?

How to remember my Aunt Fan? She raised me after her younger sister, my mother, got sick and we spent hours together picking berries, decorating gingerbread cookies, and raking leaves. She tatted delicate lace the color of robin's eggs and rainbows, never married, and stayed with my mother until she died.

Where is he? My mind whirls as I wander up and down a hillside at Gate of Heaven Cemetery & Mausoleums in Los Altos, California, on a sunny June day in 2008, looking for Dennis's grave. I'd long since remarried and moved halfway across the

country and back, but I needed to visit the grave again. The cemetery was about a day's drive from Donner Memorial State Park in Truckee, where I'd been doing research for my master's thesis; Kathy came along to take a break from family responsibilities and to keep me company. I told her that I wanted to visit the cemetery to allow any unresolved emotions to resurface. Although fairly certain I had worked through my grief, I was curious to see how I felt once I stood at his grave.

We'd spent the previous night at a unremarkable hotel after searching for the house Dennis and I lived in near the San Jose Flea Market. What I remember as big cherry orchards and vacant lots are now densely packed developments of single-family crackerboxes. I tossed aside the map I bought at a gas station, unreadable due to the tiny typeface and sprawling coils of roads and strip malls that reminded me of the intricate Spirograph drawings I made as a kid. Away from Utah and its ridiculous liquor laws, we slurped margaritas at a restaurant next to the hotel and toasted our success in finding my old house on Seville Way through a maze of streets I no longer remembered and arriving at our hotel without an accident. Waking up the next morning to blaring traffic and bright sunshine, we took our time, knowing that we had the whole day to find the cemetery before heading east toward the Sierras to camp.

We stopped first at Oak Hill Funeral Home and Memorial Park, in the middle of downtown San Jose, where I thought I'd find Dennis's grave. A large funeral was about to begin, and it took me several minutes to squeeze through a crowd, including several mariachi bands, gathered in front of the main office, where they gave me the name of and directions to another cemetery north of town. As the state's oldest secular cemetery, Oak Hill turned out to be a fascinating detour. Divided into dozens of sections with pastoral names like Birch, Laurel, and Wisteria, the cemetery includes areas specifically for Druids and members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. Not surprisingly, the pioneer section contains a number of graves of Donner party members. I tried to contain the excitement in my voice as I told Kathy that no, Dennis wasn't buried here (although

it's where his funeral was held), but the Reed family was, along with William Eddy, who walked to safety then went back to the camps to rescue survivors.

How ironic that these emigrants, who spent a disastrous winter burying their babies, wives, husbands, and siblings, should suddenly appear where I least expected them. Like me, each of them walked out of a desolate landscape into a new life.

Entranced by the columbaria, we walked around the impressive Great Mausoleum with its colorful stained glass windows and statues. The glass-walled cubicles for cremated remains stretched to the ceiling with funerary urns shaped like books and vases and alphabet blocks, both stately and sort of strange, if, like us, you never had seen anything like that before.

By the time we had driven across the Santa Clara Valley to Los Altos, we were more at ease in heavy traffic and sated by the unexpected Donner party discoveries. For me, that feeling of relaxation didn't last long.

He's got to be here, I tell myself, scanning the grass for the flat, brown stone. Moving quickly, I can feel the sweat drip under my arms, prickling my skin.

Gate of Heaven Cemetery resembles a classic garden cemetery with a large pond and fountain, bridge, wide streets, and sweeping lawns that nestle against the Los Altos Hills. Dennis's parents chose the location because of its remoteness, far from the bustle of Silicon Valley. Large statues of Jesus and Mary and colorful mosaics of saints and the Holy Family dotted the grounds of the Catholic cemetery.

In all the time I lived in San Jose, I only visited Dennis's grave once or twice. I was in my 20s, still angry with him for leaving me and sad to be on my own. I didn't want to be reminded that I was a young widow. Once I moved away, his mother and father tended his grave and brought flowers, sometimes as often as once a month. I wondered if they discussed my lack of interest, but they never mentioned it to me.

Several people sit three feet from where I think Dennis's grave is, and they've spread out a blanket and chairs, laughing. I want to tell them to go away, that they don't

belong here, but you just don't do that in a cemetery. Eventually I cry because I'm walking along the rows of flat headstones reading every name, moving back and forth across the hillside, able to remember the hill, but I must be in the wrong section and the sun is hot and the inside of my sunglasses is wet and the people are still laughing, and it's as if they're going to stay there the rest of the afternoon and what is wrong with me that I can't find a stupid grave and where the hell is he?

I take a few deep breaths and go back to the office where a dark-haired woman fields phone calls and accepts delivery of a birthday cake while she points to an area called St. Theresa Court on a cardboard map and confirms that Dennis is there. As I turn the corner into a courtyard with ceramic urns of pink petunias blooming wildly in each corner, I suddenly realize that he was cremated, his ashes interred with those of his older sister, Barbara. Did someone ask me about doing this? I don't remember. I watch an elderly couple unwrap a colorful bouquet and am ashamed that I did not remember to bring flowers.

I find Dennis and Barb's names etched on marble squares high above my head and have to sit down because suddenly I am dizzy. Then I am angry that their names are here, angry that they died. And then I am crying again because I was only 26 and because the birds are singing. My heart opens as a robin's chattering echoes off the marble and bounces around me the way the song of a hermit thrush pierces the morning calm in High Creek Canyon back home in Utah, where I am far from where Dennis lived and died. And that, I think, is how I want to remember Dennis: not as a pile of ashes behind a square in a wall but out in the world.

Aunt Fannie dreams of a blue jay in an oak tree. Its call sounds like a squeaky garden gate or branches scraping the windowpane. She raises her head toward the sound as black wings brush her face. She spins in the space between sleeping and waking, unsure of where she is, eyes tracing the outline of a crib. Mildred's crib. Fannie, 10,

shares a room with her sister, who has diphtheria. Her mother is often sick, her father often drunk, and she is the oldest girl, responsible for watching her younger brothers and sisters; three-year-old Mildred is her favorite.

Mildred breathes through a small tube that prevents her swollen throat from closing shut. A piece of string tied to the tube attaches to her clothing with a pin. Fannie picks up the wiggling girl, notices the missing pin, realizes she has swallowed or inhaled the tube; she is choking, throwing her head from side to side like a cranky baby who doesn't want to eat. *Mildred*, she calls, her voice thin and wavering. *Mildred! Mildred!* She shakes her sister to make her listen, but Mildred is quiet and still.

A day or two later, Fannie sees her casket in the parlor. She picks up her sister—she is as light as a bird. Fannie holds her, rocks her to heaven. *Put her down, Fannie*, her mother scolds. She hears her mother from far away and rocks the baby. *Ssssh*, she whispers. *Ssssh*.

How to remember Mildred, who died in her arms? Remembering triggers the feelings of helplessness and fear that choked her like the tube in her sister's throat. She will speak of the baby's death only once, to her niece Lynne, who is tape recording her stories. As she calls Mildred's name, Fannie goes into a trance. In her gaze, Lynne sees the outline of the tiny bed and knows she is in the darkened room remembering everything.

The year before I was born, my father left my mother, sister, and aunt and hitched a ride to California before going to Hawaii. He spent six months living on the beach and working in factories, dreaming of owning his own foundry.

What did he think about when he walked along the ocean at twilight and saw Diamond Head looming in the distance, pushing up into the Hawaiian sky? Did he whisper the names of the stars aloud while his eyes strayed to the twinkling lights of Waikiki? Maybe his mind recalled the brown leather jacket that kept him warm on

nighttime bombing runs over Berlin, how even in the thickest fog and smoke he brought “Mis-Fortune” and her crew back safely. I like to think that the sight of the familiar constellations grounded him and gave him peace, even while his mind whirled with choices he had yet to make.

After he came home, the four of them moved into a white house far away from the old neighborhood. He bought a small foundry called Taylor and Boggis and became its foreman. He wore shiny blue gray suits and white shirts with collars and cufflinks and black shoes with tiny holes. I imagined that when the sun shined, the holes made star patterns on the tops of his feet as if he carried the sky with him wherever he went.

We rarely took family vacations because Dad was always working. One summer though, we drove to Palomar Observatory in California to see the 200-inch Hale telescope, at the time, the world’s largest. The winding road led to the top of a mountain where five domed observatories stood sentry like giant marble carapaces.

I still have a stack of colorful postcards from that trip—the blue and red gas clouds of the Trifid Nebula in Sagittarius, Virgo’s “Sombrero” Galaxy, the purplish glow of the Great Nebula in Orion—but wish I could remember more. Looking back, I wonder if driving miles out of our way just so I could see a telescope I couldn’t even look through was my father’s way of telling me that someday, I could study the stars. That if I wanted something bad enough, I shouldn’t hesitate to dream big. He wasn’t the sort of person to say words like that aloud and, besides, I was only eight.

Dad planned to retire when he turned 55. Instead, he received a lung cancer diagnosis. I never knew how sick he was or that the reason he never came home from the hospital was because the doctors were worried about blood clots. My sister, Lynne, tells the story of how when she visited him on the day of a solar eclipse, March 7, 1970, he asked her to go out and buy some apple strudel. By the time she came back, he was dead.

At twilight, on November 1, 1996, our tour bus lurched to a stop outside a small

cemetery on the outskirts of Oaxaca, Mexico, as I nervously looked out the dirty window. Nervous because, although we had permission to be there, I was aware of the insect-under-glass effect of camera-toting tourists. I carried a Leica rangefinder, considered the quietest for documentary work. It looked like a cheap, automatic camera but arguably had the best optics in the business. My husband, Dan—also a photographer—was using his Nikon F4, reliable but bulky, a photojournalism workhorse.

It seemed as if the entire town was walking in our direction. Most lugged shovels, rakes, and other hand tools along with armfuls of bright yellow marigolds and fuchsia cockscombs. Excited children ran among and around the adults, full of anticipation and energy. Inside the cemetery, families pulled weeds and brushed dirt off headstones, and the air was smoky from brush-pile fires. A band of musicians wound its way through the graves accompanied by a priest offering prayers for the dead and comfort for the living. Here and there, old men rested in knots, sharing stories and watching. Two elderly men saw my tentative steps and motioned me over. I didn't speak Spanish but wasn't afraid. One held up a bottle of homemade mescal and widened his eyes. Would I like to share a drink with them? I nodded yes.

Dan and I met up about an hour later. We talked excitedly about the quality of the light, the friendliness of the people, how amazing the night had been. He was shooting color slide film in the hope that we would sell a newspaper story after we returned home. I asked him if he noticed how the sharp arc of the setting sun scattered the smoke from the fires and lit the faces so beautifully—the kind, generous faces. He said yes, he was getting some good shots too.

As I fiddled with the strap of my camera, I shifted my arm and the bottom fell off the camera. Leica rangefinders have a metal cap on the bottom with a key type of lock to keep the film in place. In my haste to change film in the growing darkness, I had forgotten to secure the cap onto a metal pin that kept it closed. I looked at Dan with tears in my eyes. All my shots were ruined. How could I have been so careless?

With one simple gesture, my camera became superfluous, the latent images on the strip of negatives aborted. With no magic box to mediate my place in the world, I felt naked, exposed. With no photographs to guide me, how would I remember this night?

By then, it was too dark to take pictures. I leaned against a cold marble headstone and stared at the sky, the scent of marigolds as sharp and fierce as the candles that burned. Around me, people collected tools, patted colorful blossoms into place, gathered family members to their sides. Grateful spirits mingled in the sweet copal smoke that guided them home, calmed the bellies of sleepy children full of sugar skulls and *pan de muerto*, kissed the lips of all who tipped bottles in one last toast. Safe in their embrace, I didn't need pictures to remember who and where I was. Freed from the expectations of the camera, I let myself melt into the night, into that cemetery alive with laughter.

I'm at a Utah thrift store, scanning the shelves for dishes to break for mosaics, my latest craft obsession. I'm entranced with the idea of purposely breaking things in order to make a beautiful object. Retreating to the garage, hammer in hand, I gleefully smash dishes, cups, and bowls and sweep shards of pottery in shades of custard, sage, and plum into separate plastic bags. The broken ceramic pieces sound like bones dancing. I fit the jagged edges together like a puzzle, framing them in snaking lines of colored grout before I rub them with a soft cloth and brush them with a clear sealant so I can display them indoors or out.

Lifting up a small stack of plates to see the patterns on the bottoms, a flash of silver catches my eye. Nestled together like a stack of tipsy crescent moons, delicate white plates edged with stars wink at me. Obviously from the 1950s or '60s, the dinner plates and saucers are small compared to what we eat off of now, symbolizing an earlier time when food meant sausage, mashed potatoes, and canned corn three nights a week.

I snatch up all the plates and cradle them in my arms. At home, I delight in their simple design and place them, unbroken, on a kitchen shelf. They remind me of my

father, just like another of my favorite possessions, a metal Mercury lunchbox from the early years of the US space program. Named after the mythological Roman messenger, Project Mercury successfully sent humans into orbit around the Earth in 1961–63.

Vincent Van Gogh said, “For my part, I know nothing with any certainty, but the sight of the stars makes me dream.” He painted perhaps his most famous work, *The Starry Night*, in an insane asylum about a year before he committed suicide. If my dad was familiar with Van Gogh’s artwork, he never told me. But I know a little about how Van Gogh felt—how your brain can’t stop spinning and it seems to you that planets look like black raspberry suns and stars glow like giant orange disks.

After my father died, I dreamed that he was running on the sands of a Hawaiian beach. I could feel the smooth white sand under his feet flowing through his toes, the dark shapes of palm trees rushing by. When I awoke, I had the overwhelming feeling that I was in his blood, and he is in mine. We were on that twilight beach together. The tidal pull of kinship blazed supernova. No photograph could capture the strength of our bond; like the Oaxacan spirits’ embrace, we share an essential connection that can never be broken.

Years ago, reeling after the end of a long relationship, I wrote my father’s sister Florence to ask if she knew why he left my family so long ago and what made him come back. He secretly tape recorded her begging him not to go to Hawaii, she didn’t speak to him for many years because of his stubborn refusal to listen. Maybe that conversation would help me understand why men leave. I still hoped my boyfriend and I would get back together. She wrote, “It’s been said he didn’t feel loved growing up—that when my mother died, no one looked after him. ... Your Dad was 15, and there was no one there for him. ... I’m convinced that in time he would have come to terms with himself, but he didn’t seek the help he so desperately needed.” She ended with, “I only see a lonely heart who wanted nothing more than to be loved.”

I wish I could tell my father that for some of us, living is enough. Now when I

search the sky at night, I see him in the stars. To me, he is Alphard, *the lonely one*.

I stand on the summit and trace the dusty folds of canyons drenched with red, yellow, orange, and green. The Indian Summer sun is warm and comforting. For the past few years, a friend and I spend one night in the shadow of the peak at the head of the canyon. On the way to our campsite, Kathy and I curse the steep incline, our too-heavy packs, and the periodic beer cans. Tied together by our good-natured complaining, we renew our love affair with the mountains and remember why we stay in a place so culturally unlike us.

The peak that supports us is composed of Ordovician limestone, a geologic period capped by the mass extinction of marine life. Contrary to its rugged exterior, limestone dissolves a little bit every time it rains.

Looking down on this familiar canyon, I can almost believe that loss is a gift; that the achingly blue sky is brighter for me because I know how black it can get. But it is simply that: the sky.

I know change will come to this canyon—more hikers, more hunters, more skiers, maybe more houses along the road. I am fearful of this place becoming just another spot on the map. I understand that we all have the need to explore new locales, that “undiscovered” places sell magazines and books, that unfulfilled dreams guide us, that this canyon doesn’t belong to me.

Yet this canyon *is* mine. Every season—the blues of winter, the exhilaration of spring, the heat of summer, the fruits of autumn—reflects the complexities of my life. I could study the biology of the cicadas, the geology of time, the ecology of riparian environments, but will those facts tell me how to live in the world? Better to open my eyes and step on the well-worn path. As T. S. Eliot wrote, faith is “in the waiting.” This may be the winter when a wall of snow thunders down the mountainside snapping trees like twigs, but see how the robins rocket overhead like planets orbiting the sun?

I never put much faith in remembering, but I see things differently now. Twenty-five years have passed since Dennis died—time enough to distance myself from death. Along with my husband, Dan, I have built a second family of friends, neighbors, and strangers. Now I see my first family as a collection of home movies. Here is my mother, her curly hair circling her head like a halo. My father runs toward her on a Hawaiian beach holding a sea urchin, laughing—did I ever hear him laugh?—barefoot, tanned, happy. Aunt Fan quietly tats lace. Dennis stands on a hilltop smiling, hands on his hips.

I hear my friends discuss their ailing parents, their aging bodies, and I remember those silent scenes. I am glad their deaths are far away, though I know more are coming. Visiting cemeteries, watching others honor their dead, noting inscribed names and the dates of their birth and passing, connects me to mourners everywhere. In our grief, we are never alone, though it may feel that way.

Next year when drifts of yellow maple leaves cover the lawn, I'll make an *ofrenda* or altar, like they do in Mexico. On a kitchen shelf, I'll arrange bright flowers in vases next to photographs of Marie, Ernest, Dennis, Frances, Ruby, Smudgy, Nanook, and Bullet. A bottle of whiskey, pieces of hard candy, catnip, and a dog bone will fill the space around the photos. In the evenings, I'll light a candle with a picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe pasted on it and drink a toast to my family and friends. I will welcome their spirits into my home and remember them as best I can.

SAVING SMUDGY

The day before Smudgy died the last of the purple plums hung heavy on the dark branches. Sparrows and finches rushed the feeder, chasing the dappled shade under the maple tree. A warm breeze ruffled the glossy green leaves, soon to fall. In the fields, the last cutting of alfalfa lay in neat curving rows, and ruby-red tomatoes filled the garden.

She sprawls on a pillow asleep, the end of her tail flicking randomly. Although it looks like any other sunny afternoon catnap, the low angle of her head hides the feeding tube in her neck, held in place by an elastic dark green dressing.

Instead of crunchy kibble, I feed her vanilla nutrition shakes blended with canned cat food four times a day. The brown liquid looks like already digested meals, the raw materials of hearts, bones, and brains. I add a chemical stew of ground-up pills and liquids to the gruel and pipe it into the feeding tube with a large plastic syringe.

When it's time to feed her, I usually find her tucked in a corner of my bedroom closet behind a row of shoes. Always a small cat, she hides among matching pairs of sturdy oxfords and sandals. She startles when I move the shoes aside and place a picnic spread of cups, towels, and syringes beside her. I sit cross-legged on the floor, jamming my body between the vacuum cleaner and boxes of photo albums before leaning over to remove the rubber stopper from the feeding tube. She tries to shake her head and get away but is weak and anemic and can't escape my hands laden with so much medicine and hope.

For half an hour, I stroke the fur on her back while slowly depressing the plunger on the syringe, a distraction that soothes her but doesn't stop the nausea that comes the moment the warm liquid moves into her body. The dark part of her coat, mahogany not black, shines like a ripe buckeye.

I am standing next to the toilet in the tiny bathroom emptying Dennis's bed bag.

The yellow liquid sloshes into the bowl with a satisfying finality. My thoughts drift to the kitchen, and I mentally gather the ingredients for the dinner I will soon prepare: the chicken breasts thawing on the countertop, the snap peas ripening in the garden, the crescent rolls wrapped in their cardboard tube in the refrigerator, the bottle of pinot noir in the cupboard. Reduced to a shopping list of specific items and tasks, my life has no room for side trips.

It has been two years since they found the tumor deep in Dennis's brain, just above his left ear. Two years of hospitals, surgeries, doctors, pills, and driving up and down the northern California coast looking for a cure.

But there is no cure. No hope for anything beyond the daily routine of anti-seizure meds, sponge baths, and bowel programs. At the end of the day, I collapse into bed alone and lie awake for hours, listening to Dennis snore softly in the living room.

Cancer is snatching him bit by bit, like a kitten unraveling a ball of yarn. First, he lost his speech, then his coordination and balance. Soon his mind will become a mass of knots, too messy to untangle.

This is not how I imagined my life at 26. How could I know that the funny, red-haired man I fell in love with would become a burden. That I would be forced to feed, dress, and nurse him the way my aunt took care of my mother after her first stroke. I feel the sting of his unfulfilled promise when I see couples walking arm in arm at the Saturday flea market. I watch them from my silent post behind Dennis's wheelchair, and as he glides over the pitted asphalt, I imagine a flock of crows circling.

My husband, Dan, and I called Smudgy "the cat that came with the house" and adopted her 10 years ago when we moved to Cache Valley. With her rich, dark brown coat, a dark spot next to her nose, and a white blaze that marked her forehead, nose, and cheeks as well as her chest and the front of her thin legs, she looked just like a cat named Smudgy.

The previous owners left her behind because she lived outside, comfortable in

the big yard surrounded by lush lilacs and tall evergreens. She preferred to be alone and caught mice and birds and found cozy places to sleep in the barn and avoided the skunks and raccoons when they'd swagger through the yard looking for food. She ate tuna voraciously and whatever dry food we left in the white bowl on top of the outside cellar. Small and lithe with a spring in her step, she lived as she pleased, beholden to no one but herself.

Then one day Dan gently rubbed the top of her head when he found her dozing near the cherry tree. He spoke to her as the rain would, a soft murmur punctuated by her name—Smudgy. She didn't have much patience for the attention but put up with it because she was too sleepy to move. He started carrying her into the house for short periods, and she learned to fall asleep while stretched out on his chest. By the time the snow flew, she was ready to be an indoor cat. She would sit by the window looking for birds, her nose pressed so close to the glass that it left tiny impressions. When the wood stove roared with heat in the middle of winter, she was always beside it. But once the weather warmed up, she was back outdoors. She loved nothing more than climbing the gnarled lilac branches to the top of the shed next door. She could hide there all day, sleeping like a stone on the cool metal amidst broken branches and leaves. Right in the middle of her world, she didn't hear us call her to come in when it rained or when packs of dogs ran loose. Completely hidden from us, we didn't find out about her secret sleeping spot until the week she died.

When I was 12, I saw a solar eclipse. I punched a hole in a cardboard box, rested the box on my head, and stood with my back to the ebbing disk. The light shone through the hole, and I could watch the earth's shadow swallow the sun without hurting my eyes. When I took the box off my head, the light had dimmed, but the sun was right where it belonged. I wondered if my father could see the eclipse from the hospital where he went for some tests. As a navigator during World War II, he knew all about planets and

stars. Our nighttime stargazing sessions sparked my grade-school dream of being an astronomer, a goal I had to abandon once I learned I had to be good at math. Dad would know what caused the eclipse, and I couldn't wait to ask him about it.

Later that day, my friend Carolyn and I played Barbies in my room. I pawed through my double-doll case stuffed with tiny plastic purses, hats, socks, boots, and gloves in a multitude of colors looking for the pink shoe with the buckle. Barbie couldn't go out with Stacey with only one shoe. The shoe was nowhere to be found, and I thought of giving up and changing her outfit when Aunt Fan burst into my bedroom crying, "Diane, your daddy's gone." She threw her arms around me sobbing loudly. Stunned, I held the one pink shoe and stared in front of me as my brain whirled. *Where did he go? Did he go to Hawaii without Mom? Is he in Detroit on business?* My aunt ushered Carolyn from the room, leaving me alone. My parents never told me he was sick. They never told me he was dying.

To speak the word *cancer* is to summon a nightmare that consumes both waking and dreaming. It is as if a python suddenly inhabits your brain. You can feel the imprint of its glossy scales on the back of your skull, slowly uncoiling and filling your head with sludge. Or else it's a hive of angry bees, buzzing and frantic. Your heart is a delicate pane of glass or a hummingbird's wing, beating wildly. Like the bees, your thoughts are desperate to get out and fly away.

Dan and I stare at the x-ray of Smudgy's torso. Her organs shine with a sinister glow. Dr. Hillegass points to the fuzzy blobs and describes their pathology: enlarged lymph nodes, extended and bloated liver, and thickened pancreas. What is causing these changes is unclear. It is likely lymphoma but could be heart disease (which is treatable), an undisclosed tumor, or a massive infection. She tells us that Smudgy's red blood cell count continues to fall. Her anemia is now life threatening because her body isn't repairing itself even with all the medicines and the added nutrition of the tube feedings.

We drive home in silence, our ears ringing with the thickness of the vet's final words about Smudgy's quality of life. We can keep her comfortable and nourished, but her blood is becoming thinner, more diluted.

"What should we do?"

"All she wants to do is hide in the closet and sleep."

"She can't even walk without falling over."

"I hate to see her suffer."

"But what if we can reverse the anemia? The vet says..."

"Can we talk about this later? My brain hurts."

When you weigh the decision to euthanize a pet, how do you know what to do? I glance at Smudgy lying quietly in the back seat. *She wants to live!* I think. But what is that life if she can't lie among the lilac blossoms and listen to the chickadees?

Growing up, I never had big pets like dogs or cats. My parakeet, Budgie, was the first pet I owned with a personality. He had a mirror in his cage, and he would peck at his reflection and talk for hours. *Pretty bird. Pretty bird. Budgie. Budgie. Budgie. Budgie. Hello baby, want a kiss?* Then he'd do some wolf whistles (my dad taught him that). It's not like we had much of a relationship, Budgie and me, but his constant chatter comforted me, like listening to your favorite record over and over until you know all the words by heart.

At this time, I bake bread for a living, hefting heavy bags of flour, loading hundreds of lumps of raw dough into the 12-door oven, watching the crusts turn golden brown, and removing the loaves when the air becomes fragrant with the scent of toasted seeds and wheat. I peer through the smudged glass doors at the rising shapes springing to life before my eyes.

I am the final step in the process that starts with a tiny seed and ends with racks

of beautiful bread. I know that a few short minutes can ruin a loaf, that each one is dependent on my constant vigilance and care.

On good days, I dance around the loader, blasting the Violent Femmes, my hands a blur as I quickly load the softly sagging batards and boules on the long strip of canvas. Other nights I stand immobile, burying my eyes into the sleeve of my shirt so my tears don't fall on the bread because I can't stop until the oven is fully loaded. When the oven is empty after baking, I start all over again.

At the end of a long bake, I am tired but wide-awake. In the dark hours before dawn, I drive the back roads home—the only car on the road—feeling raw and exposed. Although it's nearly 3:00 a.m. when I get home, I drink whiskey and water, not because it tastes good or comforts me but because it makes me forget. When I finally do relax, I am scared by how big the emptiness feels inside me, like being inside an expanding star that's about to explode.

I am useless, unable to save a small, thin cat.

I am standing next to the garage as twilight falls. The hour before sunset is my favorite time of day because the sky turns into a kaleidoscope. There are blues and violets and pinks and yellows shot with gold, all shifting and glowing and pulsing like galaxies. An ambulance slowly backs down our driveway taking my mother to the hospital. What happened this time? Another stroke? Did she choke on a chicken bone or a piece of meat? My fear keeps me from asking questions. All I want is a mother that makes waffles for me on school mornings, sews me sundresses and skirts with big pleats, and teaches me how to sleep on curlers. I face the wall, press my palms to the sides of my head, and collapse into a ball, hoping that my family and the neighbors, now gathering in small clots across the street, won't see me hiding there. My mother's illness marks me like a favorite shirt with an ugly stain, one that I can't clean or throw away.

At the mouth of the canyon, my car punches through a gray envelope of clouds, now pouring rain with a fierce intensity. The sky roils yellow and black, like an angry bruise. All around me, taillights wink insistently as rush hour traffic speeds up and slows down with a rhythm I can't seem to follow.

Smudgy lies on a striped blanket on the back seat meowing softly, acutely aware of the hum of tires, the rush of water spraying the car, the noise that fills the air and doesn't stop. We're returning home after a trip to a Salt Lake City veterinary clinic for an ultrasound appointment. I grasp at hope the way my tires strain to grip the slippery pavement. If I just knew what was making her sick, maybe I could save her.

But the expensive ultrasound brings me no closer to an answer, and soon my foot is pressing toward the floor and I'm weaving through traffic.

"Fucking jerks!" Two cars roar past me, pelting both sides of the windshield with buckets of icy rain.

"Asshole!" A teenager swerves into my lane and the car fishtails, tires spinning wildly.

I curse and scream at the world, the cars, and the sleet until my hands shake and my throat burns. Now I know why people want to shoot strangers. Don't you know that only a split second separates you from serious injury? Don't you know that accidents happen to even the most defensive drivers? Don't you know that your gleaming hunk of metal can crush your bones and scramble your brains?

I know. My boyfriend fell asleep on a dark freeway one night, hit a storm drain, and crashed through the windshield while his green Fiat flipped through the air like a carnival ride. His beautiful body shattered the back windshield and he crumpled on the dewy grass, his back broken. A paraplegic, he died from an inoperable brain tumor a few years later.

What am I doing?

The sky unzips, and I glimpse a line of clouds over the lake poised like the echo

of a heartbeat. Layers of gray press up against layers of platinum. The storm pauses and the rain stops, a breath held deep and slowly released. I, too, am tired of fighting. I take my foot off the gas to slow down while reaching back to touch the top of Smudgy's head. "It's OK, Smudge Smudge. We'll be home soon. I'm sorry I can't make you feel better." She lies there so still and quiet. My feeling of powerlessness melts away, replaced by a gentleness toward the woman who was so familiar with death yet kept on living. As I stroke the body of my dying cat, I realize that the only way to save her is to let her go. Just as ancient astronomers used the constellations to bring order to the night sky, when I stopped fighting for Smudgy's life, I discovered a way to make sense of my own.

As Indian Summer deepens, I become obsessed with food preservation. In the coming weeks, I will can 30 quarts of salsa, 8 pints of applesauce, 6 pints of peaches, freeze 5 batches of pesto, and dry countless numbers of sliced tomatoes.

Maybe in saving the fruits of summer, I can alter my memories so that when I open a jar of sliced peaches, I will remember the way the evening light slanted across the blushing fruit and not Smudgy's ragged breaths or the way she staggered to and from her water bowl.

One sunny afternoon, she cries at the back door to go outside and I follow her. She carefully steps on a garden path where dried catnip stems lean precariously. The sun warms her fur, and I imagine that she wants nothing more than to climb the lilac to the top of the shed. But I'm afraid she'll fall or pull out the feeding tube, so I shadow her every move, pausing every time she pauses, not leaving her side. She makes her way to a concrete slab in front of the lilac and sits down. The phone rings, and I rush inside to answer it. I come back outside a half hour later and find her curled up on top of the shed. I have to use a stepladder to reach her. She doesn't squirm when I carry her back inside.

The next day, I dig a grave between the plum trees. The vet is coming tomorrow. Dan won't help me, so I put on my work gloves and pull the shovel out of the barn. As

the blade bites into the dirt, I talk to Ruby, buried nearby. Ruby's sweet nature changed Dan's mind about cats. It's strange to think I knew her longer than my dad. "I miss you, Boo Boo. I miss you every day. Soon you'll have Smudgy to keep you company."

In the barn are several dozen daffodil bulbs, egg yolk yellow with bright orange centers. After I bury Smudgy, I will plant the bulbs. Next spring, when I look at the bobbing orange and yellow blossoms, I will remember how the crisp breeze rolled off the lake of my childhood and spun the revolving clothesline like a carousel. The chenille bedspreads and cotton blankets and down quilts tossed their manes and snorted like excited mares. The world turned in lazy circles under a sky as blue as sapphires.

Unlike tulips—bold one day, like skeletons the next—the ruffled cups and saucers recall the resilient spirit and brave heart of a young girl who once gazed skyward and felt the stars her own.

Late at night, just as the crickets start singing, I am aware of something moving under the plum trees. I see her stretch with liquid grace. Silently she calls the moon then steps across the cool stone path. The fat plums ripen and fall to earth like meteors, littering the ground like petals.

NOTES

- p. 1 Weston, "Edward Weston Biography."
- p. 5 Harrison, *While They Slept*, 20.
- p. 6 Ibid., 245.
- p. 6 Johnson, "Unfortunate Emigrants," 3.
- p. 7 Houghton, qtd. in Johnson, Introduction, ix.
- p. 7 Johnson, Introduction, x.
- p. 11 Weston, "Edward Weston Biography."
- p. 15 Morris, *Minnesota Daily*, 11.
- p. 25 *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Ghoul."
- p. 30 Frost, *The Road Not Taken*, 1.
- p. 31 Bush, "Donner Trail," 10D.
- p. 32 *Random House Webster's Unabridged Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. "Obsess."
- p. 36 Mullen, *Donner Party Chronicles*, 136.
- p. 38 "Who better than...": Houghton, *Expedition*, xviii.
- p. 39 "blessed with the sunshine...": Houghton, *Expedition*, xix.
- p. 40 Stegner, Interview.
- p. 42 Donner, qtd. in Burton, *Searching*, 283.
- p. 43 Davis, "Compilation," 64.
- p. 44 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain*, 86.
- p. 45 "None of his people...": Murbarger, "Mystery Man," 10.
- p. 45 "This mixture...": Ibid.
- p. 47 "everybody knew him...": Davis Collection, 8-19-308: 1-2.
- p. 47 "proud and prominent...": Ibid.
- p. 47 "black sheep...": Ibid.
- p. 47 "a dirty fisherman...": Ibid.

- p. 47 “got the wanderlust...”: Ibid.
- p. 47 “for some reason...”: Ibid.
- p. 48 “just slid and fell...”: Ibid.
- p. 50 “More thrilling...”: McGlashan, *History*, 6.
- p. 52 “the work of...”: Davis Collection, 8-19-308:1–2.
- p. 53 “Scarcely taking time...”: Murbarger, “Monarch,” 16.
- p. 53 “some of the most...”: Ibid.
- p. 53 “Brought forth under...”: Murbarger, “Mystery Man,” 13.
- p. 53 “possessed a matchless...”: Murbarger, *Sovereigns*, IX.
- p. 53 “proud, courageous...”: Ibid.
- p. 54 “It may seem like...”: Ibid.
- p. 54 “food and warmth...”: Murbarger, *Sovereigns*, VIII.
- p. 54 “burn[ed] an assortment...”: Ibid.
- p. 54 “pleasurable”: Ibid.
- p. 54 “good historian...”: Murbarger, *Sovereigns*, 309.
- p. 54 “place to a company...”: Davis, “Compilation,” [106].
- p. 55 “got through fine...”: Ibid.
- p. 55 “Everything I had...”: Ibid.
- p. 55 “if better sense...”: Davis, “Compilation,” [101].
- p. 56 “not an important hero...”: Murbarger, “Mystery,” 10.
- p. 59 Schlereth, *Celestial Navigation*, vii.
- p. 66 *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Memorial Day,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memorial_Day (accessed March 10, 2009).
- p. 66 *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “taphos,” <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?search=taphos&searchmode=none> (accessed February 20, 2009).
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- p. 66 Fig. 1 caption, Davis Collection, 5-11-308.
- p. 67 Ruby, *Secure the Shadow*, 7.
- p. 69 Batchen, *Forget Me Not*, 98.
- p. 78 Van Gogh, http://thinkexist.com/quotation/for_my_part_i_know_nothing_with_any_certainty-but/254951.html (accessed February 20, 2009).
- p. 79 Eliot, *Four Quartets*, 15.

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